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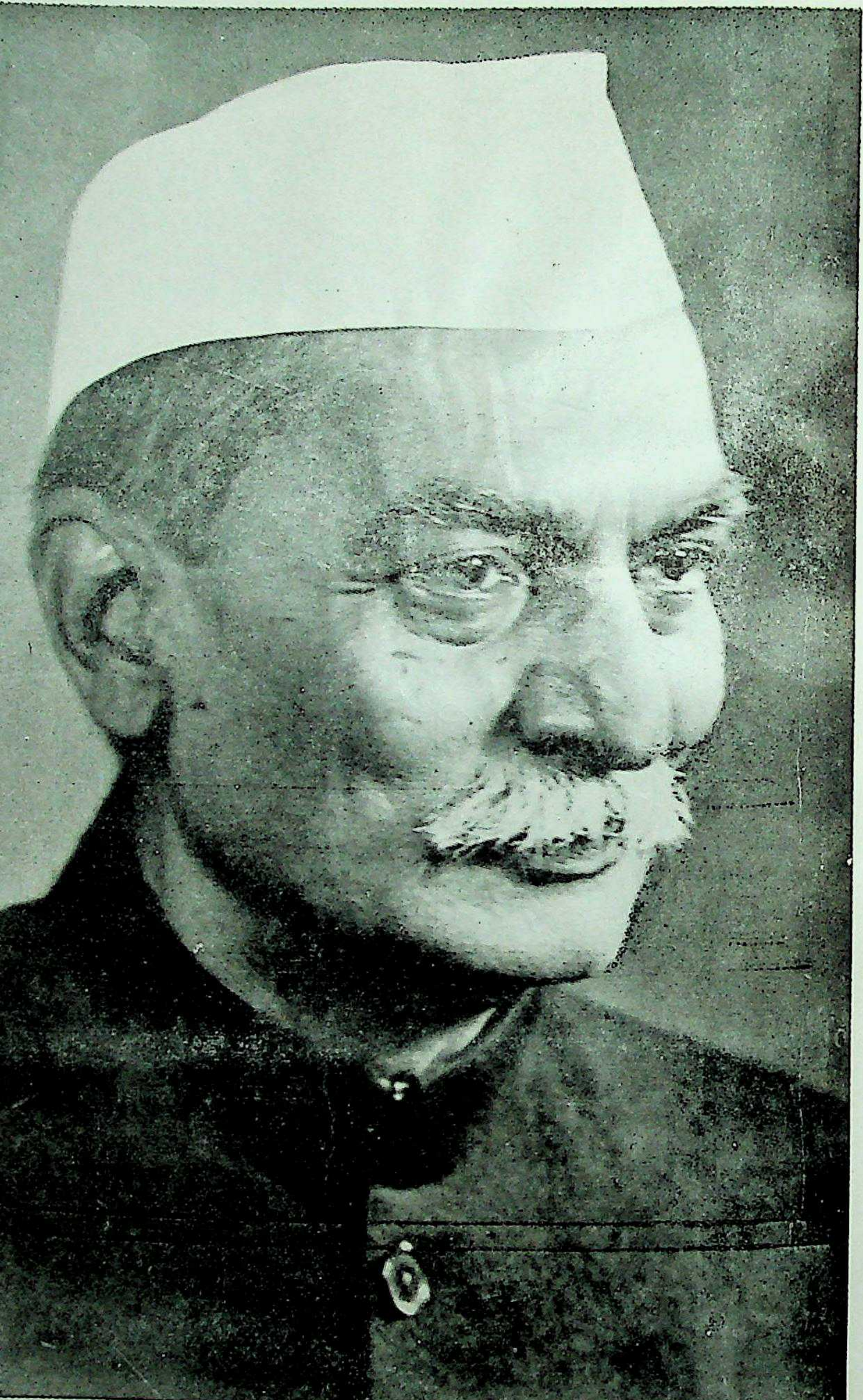

Builders of Modern India

RAJENDRA PRASAD

KALI KINKAR DATTA

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PREFACE

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD was one of the noblest personalities of our time. A scholar of vast erudition, a humanist to the core with a feeling of love for all, a deeply religious man inspired by lofty ideals, a fearless patriot and national hero, who placed service above self, being always in the vanguard of our struggle for freedom as a devoted follower of Mahatma Gandhi, and an enlightened and successful guide of the country after her emancipation from alien domination, he has left a legacy of inspiration for generations to come. His brilliant career, described in the different chapters of this volume, in many respects. illumines the pages of history of our country, particularly those which relate to the successive phases of our national movement.

In Chapter I, I have traced Dr. Rajendra Prasad's ancestry and early life, and in Chapter II has been given an account of the few years of his youth which he spent in Calcutta as a student and a lawyer, when a new awakening dawned in his mind under the influence of some invigorating socio-cultural forces sweeping over our country. In Chapter III, I have explained the genesis and significance of Mahatma Gandhi's mission in Champaran, in response to the piteous appeals of the peasants of this part of Bihar, who were severely afflicted by the oppression of the indigo planters, and its profound influence on Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Indeed, this marked a turning point in his career and also in the history of our nationalism. In Chapter IV has been reviewed his prominent role in the Satyagraha of 1919 and in the Non-cooperation Movement, which gave a clarion call to the country in its fight for freedom. The period from 1924 to 1928, described in Chapter V, was marked by his engagement in constructive activities on the lines laid down by Mahatma Gandhi, and he also undertook a journey to Europe in 1928 in connection with an appeal filed by the Maharaja of Dumraon in the Burma case of Hari Prasad Sinha as he was committed to see it through.

From 1929 there was a new turn in the history of Indian nationalism with a tremendous stir in the minds of the people, and they boldly launched the Civil Disobedience Movement from 1930 to 1934. Dr. Rajendra Prasad guided this movement in Bihar with unflinching determination and courage in the face of untold odds. The story of his various efforts and activities in this connection has been narrated in Chapter VI. Chapter VII is a description of the pathetic condition of Bihar due to the ravages of the disastrous earthquake of 1934 and Dr. Rajendra Prasad's humanitarian activities to alleviate the acute miseries of the affected people. His work as President of the Indian National Congress in 1934 and his other allied activities have been reviewed in Chapter VIII, and this is followed in the next chapter by a review of his role in the Congress elections and in the working of the new constitution introduced by the Act of 1935. In Chapters X and XI, I have presented account of his attitude and activities during the crisis of World War II, his policy and stand in connection with the individual Civil Disobedience Movement in 1940-41, and his efforts to remove the pernicious effects of the canker of communalism by promoting all-round harmony. The Indian Revolution of 1942-43 was a gigantic challenge to British imperialism and Rajendra Babu's role in organising it in Bihar has been studied in detail in Chapter XII. His active association with the various episodes and incidents of the period between 1944 and 1947 and characterised by India's march to independence have been elucidated in Chapter XIII. His position and manifold contributions as President of Constituent Assembly and also as President of India and his goodwill missions to foreign countries in his latter capacity have been discussed in Chapters XIV and XV. In the concluding Chapter, I have tried, in my own humble way, to form an estimate of Dr. Rajendra Prasad's ideals and personality.

Some biographies of Dr. Rajendra Prasad have already been published in different languages. I have gone through them. But for the preparation of this volume, I have exhaustively used ample original material collected from various sources. Dr. Rajendra Prasad's *Autobiography* is a mine of information relating to the different periods of his life. Supplementary details have been collected from his numerous other writings and speeches, and his correspondence with Mahatma Gandhi, his friends and co-workers and with the Government; the Annual Reports and Proceedings of the Indian National Congress; the Reports and Proceedings of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee and various other allied organisations in Bihar; and reports and statements published occasionally in the different issues of *The Young India, The Harijan,* the *Desh* (Hindi), *The Searchlight, The Indian Nation* and other daily papers of India. Records of the British Government, including some confidential papers, the study of which was made possible for researchers only a few years back, have supplied me with plenty of new material which has been incorporated in this work. Statements of many of those who were associated with Dr. Rajendra Prasad in the national movement or social and literary activities have also proved a valuable source of information.

I am profoundly grateful to the Government of India for selecting me to write a biography of such a great man. I may humbly submit that I have tried to discharge this task faithfully in the midst of my various other preoccupations and obligations with the kind assistance and valuable co-operation of many persons of enlightened disposition. I am deeply obliged to the Bihar Government for permitting me to study their records for this work. I am thankful to Acharya Badrinath Varma, Deputy Chairman, Bihar State University Commission, and to its Secretary, Dr. T. B. Mukherjee, for their generosity which enabled me to utilise the assistance of a Research Assistant, Dr. Rameshwar Prasad, to collect material for a few months. My thanks are due to those who, out of their goodness, gave statements and copies of their correspondence for use in connection with this work. One of them, whose name I mention specially with gratitude, is Shri Ram Navami Prasad, Advocate, Muzaffarpur, who was an associate of Mahatma Gandhi during his Champaran Mission and also an intimate friend of Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Dr. S. N. Bose, Principal of the Presidency College, Calcutta, sent to me some valuable papers about Dr. Rajendra Prasad for which I am deeply grateful to him.

26-2-1969 **K. K. DATTA**

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CHAPTER I

ANCESTRY AND EARLY LIFE

RAJENDRA PRASAD was born at Zeradei, a village in the district of Saran in Bihar, on December 3, 1884, a year before the establishment of the Indian National Congress. His ancestors had migrated long ago from a village called Amorha in Uttar Pradesh to Ballia. A branch of this family, to which Rajendra Prasad belonged, settled at Zeradei and another branch moved to Gaya. Rajendra Prasad's grandfather, Mishri Lal, died at an early age and his only son, Mahadev Sahai, father of Rajendra Prasad, was brought up with care by Mishri Lal's elder brother, Chaudhur Lal, along with his own son, Jagdev Sahai. Chaudhur Lal rose to the position of Dewan of the Hathua Estate during the time of Maharaj Chhatradhari Sahi, who, for certain reasons, disinherited his own son and declared his grandson, Rajendra Pratap Sahi, to be his heir. Chaudhur Lal was thoroughly loyal and devoted to his young master and protected him in all respects during the period of a suit started by some members of the old Raja's family for inheritance which went up to the Privy Council but was decided in favour of Rajendra Pratap Sahi. By efficient management of the affairs of the Estate as its Dewan for more than twenty-five years, Chaudhur Lal enhanced its income by 300 per cent. The status of his own family was also improved and he purchased a zamindari yielding an annual income of Rs. 7,000 in the names of his wife and the wife of his brother. When on the death of Maharaj Rajendra Pratap Sahi, the Hathua Estate passed under the control of the Court of Wards for some time. Chaudhur Lal gave up his Dewanship as he did not know English and went to Zeradei. After serving the Tamukhi Estate in Gorakhpur for some time as Dewan, he left this place, as its climate did not suit him and spent his last days in Zeradei. Rajendra Prasad's elder sister, Bhagavati Devi, was married into a rich family. But the family lost all its property within a few years, and Bhagavati Devi's husband died at the house of her father at Zeradei. Rajendra Prasad's father did not look after the Estate as his brother was in charge of it, but he was much interested in gardening. He knew Persian well and had some knowledge of Sanskrit. He studied Ayurvedic and Unani systems of medicine and distributed medicines free to the poor people. He had a well-built body and he was fond of exercise and wrestling and horse-riding. Rajendra Prasad learnt riding from him and also participated in village games like *kabaddi* and *chikka.*

From his childhood, Rajendra Prasad had the habit of going to bed early and waking up before dawn. During winter when the nights were long, he got up early and roused his mother also from sleep. The pious lady then recited *bhajans* and narrated some stories from the *Ramayana*, which "had a deep influence" on the boy. "Going to bed at sunset and waking up early became with me", writes Rajendra Prasad, "a habit which I could never shake off and it continued while I was in college."

Like other Indian villages of those days, Zeradei was a self-sufficient unit supplying the villagers with almost all the articles needed for everyday life and other things like sweetmeat and fish were purchased from shopkeepers who came to the village market held twice a week. Things not ordinarily available there were brought from Siwan, a sub-divisional town having a Magistrate's Court, a police station and some big shops. Life in the villages in those days "was far simpler" than what it became later on.[1] Mangoes in the season and bananas were the common fruits which the villagers could get.

Religion "permeated village life".[2] Zeradei had two small *mathas* or monasteries, in each of which the traditional worship was performed by a sadhu. The villagers arranged for the food of these sadhus and the *mathas*, supported by subscriptions from the local people, were decorated profusely on the *Ramnavami* and *Janmashtami* festival days. In the month of *Kartika* (October), almost every year a Pandit came to one of these *mathas* and recited the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavata* or any other *Purana*. The Pandit was the guest of the villagers by turn and on the last day of the *katha*, the latter made suitable offerings to him. Though few in the villages could read or write, many of them often assembled in the evenings at the *matha* to listen to recitations from the *Ramayana*, and joined one who recited it along with various musical instruments. This sort of recitation from the *Ramayana* "left a deep impression" on Rajendra Prasad "in his very childhood".[3] *Ramalila*, staged in the month of Aswin (September), was a source of entertainment to the village folk. *Holi* was the most popular festival and other festivals were *Diwali*, *Dussehra* (regarded as a festival of the zamindars) and *Anant Chaturdasi*.

A village having a Muslim population was provided with a mosque. Harmony prevailed among the Hindus and the Muslims. The Muslims joined the Hindus in the festival of *Holi* and the Hindus took part in *Muharram*.

Disputes among the villagers were in most cases amicably settled in those days and people seldom resorted to litigation.

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1. *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 9
2. *Ibid*, p.13
3. *Ibid*, p. 11

The family of Rajendra Prasad had a small zamindari and its relations with its tenants were cordial.

According to the usual practice prevailing among the Kayasthas of the U.P. and Bihar, Rajendra Prasad along with his two cousins, was initiated into the study of Persian at the age of five or six by a Maulavi. The eldest of them was Jamuna Prasad. As Persian was the official language during the medieval period, its study had then become a matter of practical necessity for the Hindus, and many of them belonging to northern India learnt Persian out of this consideration. In six months Rajendra Prasad and his associates picked up the Persian alphabet and began reading the *Karima.* A new Maulavi, appointed after the old one had left them, was a more successful teacher and reading under him for two years they completed the *Karima, Mamkima, Khushahal Simiya, Gulistan, Bostan,* etc. On Thursday afternoons and Fridays, which were holidays for the boys reading in the village *Maktab,* they learnt counting and the *Kaithi* script. There was no separate building of any kind for the *Maktab.* It was located in a verandah of the house where the Maulavi lived adjacent to the ancestral house of Rajendra Prasad. The boys read in the *Maktab* from the morning to even after sunset, with some recess for an hour for breakfast and a recess for an hour and a half at noon for midday meal.

After Rajendra Prasad had received elementary education in the village, his guardians sent him for English education to Chapra. His elder brother. Mahendra Prasad, who had already gone there for a similar object, stayed in a small house. He had a tutor to coach him. But the services of this tutor had been dispensed with before the arrival of Rajendra Prasad and the latter received assistance only from his brother. This taught him the habit of self-reliance.

"The child is father of the man" is a highly fitting observation. Signs of future greatness were present in the life of Rajendra Prasad from his early days. He joined the Chapra District School in the eighth class which was then the class for beginners. Through undivided attentiveness in the class and conscientious devotion to studies, the boy Rajendra Prasad stood first in the class test held at the end of the year and secured such high marks that the head master of the school, Kshirod Chandra Roy Choudhury, who enjoyed much reputation for efficiency, gave him a double promotion.

After passing the Entrance Examination, Rajendra Prasad's brother got him admitted to the Patna College and he, along with his two co-villagers, Jamuna Prasad and Ganga Prasad, left Chapra to join the T. K. Ghosh School at Patna, which was then "considered to be a very good school with a large number of students on the rolls".[4] At this school he laboured hard to make up his deficiency and prove worthy of the double promotion he had received from his head master at Chapra. Devoted to his studies, Rajendra Prasad was also mindful of games and sports and his brother was quite good at football, cricket and other games. The latter took his Intermediate Examination after two years and went to Zeradei, and Rajendra Prasad remained at Patna getting regular promotions during those years. On account of mismanagement, the income of their family zamindari came down. But the expenses on education of both the brothers, when Rajendra Prasad was reading for the Entrance Examination at Chapra and his brother who was in his B.A. in the Allahabad University, were arranged by their father, though at times with much difficulty.

Rajendra Prasad was married at the age of thirteen when he was reading in the fifth standard. At the *tilak*, which is a symbol of betrothal, clothes, utensils and a sum of Rs. 2,000 in cash were received by his father from the bride's party, according to the prevailing custom. Consistent with the prestige of the family, the marriage of Rajendra Prasad was celebrated with pomp and splendour. The marriage was to be celebrated at Dalan-Chapra in Ballia district, 64 kilometres from Zeradei, and the marriage party went there in an elaborate procession.

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[4] *Ibid*, p. 16

Rajendra Prasad studied for some time in the Hathua School. But he did not feel very happy there about the method of teaching which laid stress on 'memorising without understanding' and also because he fell ill which kept him confined to bed till the annual examination. After his recovery from illness, he was sent back tc the Chapra District School where he was readmitted to the same fourth class. At Chapra, he lived under the guardianship of Vikramaditya Misra, a famous astrologer and deeply religious person.

At the Chapra School, Rajendra Prasad found himself in a congenial atmosphere. As there was a large number of boys in his class, it was split into 3 sections. His section was placed in charge of Rasik Lal Roy, who had an "excellent method of teaching" and unfailing kindness for the pupils. He had "a great love and respect for him". A student's goodness and devotion to studies fascinates one who is a teacher in the right sense of the term. So, Rajendra Prasad, an ideal student, soon became a favourite of Rasik Lal Roy, an ideal teacher. This teacher predicted a better success for his pupil and this enhanced his zeal for studies and enabled him to go above the top-most boy of his class, Ramanugraha, within two years. In the annual examination in the third class, Rajendra Prasad secured the third rank but in the class examination in the second class he stood first. The Sanskrit teacher of the school was Mahamahopadhyay Raghunandan Tripathi. But "of all the teachers in the school", writes Rajendra Prasad, "it was Rasik Lal Roy who had made an abiding impression on me. As months passed, my familiarity with him grew into intimacy. I feared him and yet had affection and reverence for him. My association with Rasik Lal Roy helped me to increase my general knowledge. He used to tell us a lot about the country and explain how one could rise high in life".[5] A teacher, named Rajendra Prasad, taught history to his class and his method of teaching was excellent. Rasik Lal Roy's selfless love for his pupil, whom he always encouraged to work hard for obtaining high position in the examinations and even gave him free tuition, was a source of inspiration to Rajendra Prasad who, by virtue of his intelligence, industry and undivided attention to studies, stood first in the Entrance Examination of the University of Calcutta, the jurisdiction of which then extended over Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam. This was Rajendra Prasad's grand reward for his unflinching devotion to duty. He was awarded a scholarship of Rs. 20 a month for securing the highest total of marks and a scholarship of Rs. 10 a month for standing first in English. Of the other students of the Chapra School, Ramanugraha received a scholarship of Rs. 20, two students of Rs. 15 and two others of Rs. 10 each. A large number of students passed in the First Division. On the whole the result of this school that year was excellent and neither this school nor any other in Bihar had anything like this to its credit till then. This was a matter of joy to the teachers, the students and the members of the public. Braj Kishore Prasad, a promising lawyer, arranged a party to celebrate this event, though Rajendra Prasad could not join it due to illness. Rasik Lal Roy "was elated beyond measure".

Rajendra Prasad's brother, after passing his B.A. examination from the Muir College in Allahabad, went to Calcutta and joined the Duff College for his M.A. and the Ripon College for his B.L. During his holiday trips home, the elder brother used to recite to the younger one stories about what had happened in the cities. Once, perhaps in 1899, he talked about the *Swadeshi* idea and brought some *Swadeshi* cloth. Since then Rajendra Prasad always used *Swadeshi* cloth till the *Khadi* movement was started by Mahatma Gandhi.

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[5] *Ibid*, p. 26

CHAPTER II

AS STUDENT AND LAWYER

RAJENDRA PRASAD had stated in his application form for the Entrance Examination that in case he got a scholarship he would study in the Presidency College in Calcutta and so his guardians decided to send him there. When his career was to take a new turn, his beloved teacher, guide and philosopher, Rasik Lal Roy, spoke to him some words of advice in the language of his heart. He cautioned him that as he was the first Bihari boy to stand first in the Entrance Examination, the Bengali boys might try to bring him down in competition and so exhorted him "to maintain by hard work" the position he had attained and to be always in touch with him. He observed : "Calcutta is a very big city. It is full of places of entertainment and distraction, many of which are undesirable. You should keep away from all these and spare no pains for maintaining your high standard".[1] These words of advice were duly cherished by Rajendra Prasad and he deservedly fulfilled his teacher's expectations in his subsequent career as a student.

The Principal of the Presidency College, Dr. P. K. Roy, an eminent scholar, admitted Rajendra Prasad to his institution in due recognition of his merit. But he could not get a seat in the Eden Hindu Hostel of which his brother was a boarder. So, an extra cot was arranged for him in his brother's room.

For Intermediate course all students had to study, in those days, physics, chemistry, mathematics, English, one other language and history and logic. There were then some renowned scholars on the teaching staff of the Presidency College, namely, Dr. P. K. Roy, Dr. J. C. Bose and Dr. P. C. Ray, who left an indelible impression on the minds of their students by their scholarship and strength of character. There were a few Hindi-knowing boys in Rajendra Prasad's class and he made friendship with Devi Prasad Khetan, a Marwari, who went there from Bihar. Among the Bengali students with whom he came in close contact, some became his intimate friends later on. They were Yogendra Narain Majumdar, who eventually became a High Court Judge, Girish Chandra Sen, who became Secretary to the Bengal Government, Abinash Chandra Majumdar, who after retirement from Government service as a translator practised as a lawyer, and J. M. Sen Gupta, who shot to fame as a great patriot.

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[1] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 29

Rajendra Prasad's studies were somewhat disturbed due to attacks of malaria. But he was soon cured by the treatment of Dr. Nil Ratna Sarkar and after his recovery he devoted himself assiduously to make good his deficiency by reading books other than the prescribed ones. He got the highest marks in all the subjects in the college test which was held prior to the University Examination and some of his teachers, out of their own goodness and affection for him, took extra classes to enable him to get the requisite attendance. In the final F.A. Examination also in 1904, he stood first, having secured the highest marks in English, Persian and logic, but in science and mathematics another student got a few marks more. For two years, he received a scholarship of Rs. 25 a month, besides a scholarship of Rs. 10 for having stood first in English and the Duff scholarship of Rs. 15 for having stood first in the languages. Some prize books were also given to him for standing first in logic.

When Rajendra Prasad returned to Zeradei during the summer holidays after his F.A. Examination, there was a lot of agitation in Chapra regarding overseas travel on the return of the famous mathematics scholar, Dr. Ganesh Prasad, after his study in England and Germany. Most of the people were still orthodox and were against accepting foreign-returned persons into the fold of the caste. But there were some reformists, headed by Braj Kishore Prasad, a young promising lawyer, who were opposed to such rigours. The latter arranged a community dinner for Ganesh Prasad in which Rajendra Prasad's father agreed to participate at the request of Braj Kishore Prasad. As Rajendra Prasad's father could not attend the dinner, he sent him and his two cousins, Jamuna and Ganga, to Ballia to take part in it. This "caused a great stir" there. At Chapra an agitation was started to ex-communicate those who had participated in the community dinner. On returning to his village, Rajendra Prasad came to know that for his brilliant success in examinations his father had performed some religious rites and had arranged a party which was attended by the Kayasthas not only of Zeradei but also of the adjacent villages.

A convention of the Kayasthas of the Chapra district was soon held at Chapra to consider the question of overseas travel, and Mahamahopadhyay Shiv Kumar Shastri reached there from Varanasi with his mandate against it. But it ended in a pandemonium on the question of the election of its president. A good deal of pressure was exerted on the members of Rajendra Prasad's family and they were threatened with social boycott. All this, however, proved to be of no avail and the people of the locality kept normal relations with them. Gradually, the impediments against foreign travel of the Kayasthas were removed.

Fascinated by the high quality of teaching of Dr. J. C. Bose and Dr. P. C. Ray, Rajendra Prasad wanted to study science, though his history teacher, Professor Benayendra Nath Sen, also an accomplished scholar and kind man, used to encourage him in all possible ways, even by visiting him in his hostel. But after his F.A. result was out, he joined the B.A. Class, taking into consideration his comparatively low marks in mathematics and science subjects in that examination.

For his B.A., Rajendra Prasad first thought of offering Honours in the three subjects of philosophy, English and history with economics. But he soon dropped his Honours in Philosophy and continued to study Honours in the other two subjects. When after some time he listened to the highly interesting lectures of Dr. P. K. Roy on philosophy, he regretted that he had given up Honours in it. English was taught by Percival, a great scholar and ideal teacher in all respects, whose "simplicity, devotion to duty, unassuming manners and strictness could not but make a great impression" on all his students, who "feared and respected" him.[2] Percival was on the staff of the Presidency College for thirty years, serving for some time as its Principal, and his memory has been cherished by his pupils with feelings of deep regard.

Examples of such teachers of noble character formed, no doubt, a source of inspiration to Rajendra Prasad. But at the same time it was during his student life in Calcutta that he felt the impact of some other wholesome influences which stirred his mind towards social and cultural activities and sowed in it, seeds of political consciousness. Recalling the period of fifteen years Rajendra Prasad spent in Calcutta, he observed in his Convocation Address to the Calcutta University on December 26, 1952 : "The memory of those days fills my heart with joy. That was a crucial time in the history of our country, as after the partition of Bengal an India-wide agitation had started. The students of Calcutta could contact not only the political leaders of Bengal but also prominent men of the whole country and even from outside because in those days Calcutta was the capital of India. The atmosphere of those times, I recollect it to-day, brimmed with new life and new aspirations. I could not resist their influence."

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[2] *Ibid*, p. 41

In Bengal, this period was marked not only by a new political awakening but also by a wave of cultural renaissance, lofty religious idealism and a zeal for social regeneration and service. An organisation started in 1902 with the object of training youths in genuine national culture, equipping them with a knowledge of current affairs, helping them to build up their character and infusing into their minds the spirit of love for the country, was the Dawn Society. The organisation owed its origin to the untiring efforts of Satish Chandra Mukherjee, a selfless patriot and educationist of inspired zeal, who was assisted in this work by eminent personages like Gurudas Banerjee, N. N. Ghosh, Sister Nivedita and some others. Its membership was open to students and in the two classes held every week under its auspices, lectures on the *Bhagwad Gita* and current affairs were delivered. Rajendra Prasad enlisted himself as a member of the Dawn Society and was bound by ties of friendship with many students, two of whom were Benoy Kumar Sarkar, who won great distinction later on as a scholar and professor, and Rabindra Narain Ghosh who rose to the position of Principal of the Ripon College in Calcutta. The Dawn Society exercised considerable influence on the career of Rajendra Prasad. "Association with the Society", he writes, "stirred my thoughts. Examinations no longer held my attention and my imagination was caught by public and social affairs".[3] As a matter of fact, his earlier inclinations for public activities were "now crystallised". He started a Bihari Club in Calcutta and associated himself with the College Union. He was elected Secretary of the Union for one year and had a hand in running a monthly magazine on its behalf. Probably this magazine appeared in manuscript.

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[3] *Ibid*, p. 42

These were indeed highly stirring days when Indian minds were profoundly influenced by various factors, external as well as internal, and national discontent was intensified, particularly from the year 1905, which formed a turning point not only in the history of India but also in that of Asia as a whole. Japan's victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 was hailed as a glorious triumph of an Asiatic power over white imperialism and generated new enthusiasm and hopes of liberation in different parts of this continent.[4]

Inside the country, Lord Curzon's rigorous administrative measures, particularly his ill-conceived step of partitioning Bengal, intensely excited national feelings and were very much responsible for the growth of extremism in Indian politics. In total disregard of public opinion throughout India against the scheme of partition, Curzon announced it by a Government Resolution, dated July 19, 1905, and it became a "settled fact" on October 16, 1905, when the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was brought into existence with Dacca as its capital and Sir Bamflyde Fuller as its Lieutenant-Governor. "The announcement", observes Surendranath Banerjea, "fell like a bomb-shell upon an astonished public. . . . We felt that we had been insulted, humiliated and tricked." On the plea of administrative efficiency, it was a calculated and subtle move to disintegrate

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[4] C. F. Andrews, *The Renaissance in India*, pp. 4-6; Minto, Lady, *India; Minto and Morely*, p. 371

Bengal and a deliberate blow to growing nationalism in this Province. It shocked public conscience in Bengal and elsewhere and evoked protests from different quarters. The Swadeshi and boycott movements gathered immense momentum. Feeling for Swadeshi assumed a "religious hue" and the youths of Bengal took the Swadeshi vow invoking God's help.

Almost every day protest meetings were held in Calcutta and at some other places and some of these were addressed by prominent nationalists like Surendranath Banerjea, Bepin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh, who were gifted with wonderful eloquence. The anti-partition and Swadeshi movements deeply influenced the minds of the students including the inmates of the Eden Hindu Hostel, and they were swayed by tremendous enthusiasm. Rajendra Prasad used to attend these meetings, though he did not leave the educational institution like some other students nor did he join the Bengal National College which was established under the auspices of the National Council of Education in August, 1906. But by taking interest in the meetings and agitation, Rajendra Prasad "began to devote less time to books and became somewhat indifferent to examinations."[5] However, by virtue of his keen intellect he acquitted himself creditably in the B.A. Examination, topping the list of successful candidates. He secured the first rank in History Honours, high marks in English Honours and good marks in philosophy, and got two scholarships, one of Rs. 50 and the other of Rs. 40. He joined his M.A. and B. L. classes in the Calcutta University.

The "Bihari students in Calcutta were much influenced by the Swadeshi agitation". As a sequel to this enthusiasm was born a desire in their minds for convening a conference of Bihari students and Rajendra Prasad was entrusted with the mission of organising it at Patna. At the annual meeting of the Bihari Club in Calcutta, held on July 29, 1906, under the presidentship of Khan Bahadur Maulavi Muhammad Yusuf, the following resolution, moved by Rajendra Prasad and seconded by Shukdev Prasad Varma, was passed : "In the opinion of this meeting it is desirable that a conference of Bihari students be held during the ensuing Puja holidays for the purpose of considering what steps should be taken to establish an association of young men of Bihar, aiming at amelioration of the condition of Bihar in general, and of the student community in particular, in all possible ways."[5a] Here he contacted the students and some prominent citizens including Sachchidananda Sinha and Mahesh Narain, Editor of *The Bihar Times*. With their encouragement and support, the students held their conference for the first time in 1906 in the hall of the Patna College under the presidentship of the famous barrister, Sharfud-din. Representatives of most of the colleges and schools of Bihar participated in it. Its proceedings were conducted in English and Rajendra Prasad read out a written speech explaining its aims and objects. Taking into consideration the prevailing deficiencies in education and public life in Bihar, the participants wisely decided after some discussion that this organisation of the students "would not take part in political agitation". But though "dominated by youth", it "was the first platform where Biharis met to discuss questions of common interest"[6] and after a few years its membership was extended to all students studying in Bihar. The Bihari Students' Conference was the first students' conference in India and was presided over at its annual sessions by eminent personalities like Sharfud-din, Hasan Imam, Sachchidananda Sinha, Rajendra Prasad, Parmeshwar Lal, Deep Narain Sinha, Braj Kishore Prasad, Mazharul Haque and Prof. Jadunath Sarkar from Bihar, and

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[5] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 4

[5a] *The Beharee*, August 3, 1906

[6] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 40

Mahatma Gandhi, Srimati Sarojini Naidu, Mrs. Annie Besant, Rev. C. F. Andrews, Srimati Sarala Bala Devi and Dr. Ganesh Prasad from outside. It played a prominent role in the history of Bihar until the beginning of the Non-Co-operation Movement "when its activities slackened because all its front-rank workers joined the bigger agitation."[7] It was for several years not only a source of inspiration to the leaders of public life in Bihar but also a training ground for the students in the art of public speaking and for social welfare work.

Shortly after the Students' Conference had been started, Rajendra Prasad, contrary to his earlier desire not to join Government service, thought of going to England somehow for the I.C.S. Examination. He had his brother's approval for this and all arrangements for the journey were complete. But the idea had to be abandoned as his ailing father and some other members of his family were not in favour of it. By a strange turn of events his friend Shukdev Prasad Varma left for England in a few days with his money and clothes. Rajendra Prasad continued his studies in Calcutta.

On hearing that his father's illness had taken a serious turn, Rajendra Prasad went from Calcutta to Zeradei, and his brother, who had been working for some time as a teacher in the Raj School at Dumraon, also reached there. Their father passed away in March 1907. All the members of his family were present at his death-bed. Rajendra Prasad's brother had then two daughters and a son named Janardan, and Rajendra Prasad's eldest son, Mrityunjay was born that year. The management of the affairs of the family became now the sole responsibility of Rajendra Prasad's brother, who took all care to see that Rajendra

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[7] *Ibid*, p. 50

Prasad's studies did not suffer in the least due to any anxiety on account of money or for any other reason. But owing to his father's death, his "I.C.S. obsession" and growing interest in extra-collegiate activities, Rajendra Prasad could secure only second in the second class in his M.A. Examination in English in 1907 and there were three students who got a first class in English in that year. At the suggestion of one of his friends, named Baidyanath Narayan Sinha, who was working at the Muzaffarpur College, Rajendra Prasad joined the staff of that college in July 1908, and continued there for ten months. At the persuasion of his brother, he once again decided to study law. So he returned to Calcutta in March 1909 to appear for the law examination. Referring to the period when Rajendra Prasad was a student, he remarks : "When I look back on my student days, they appear to belong to a golden age. I had no worries and I had the best of opportunities. ...Calcutta opened my eyes to the world and the days I spent in the Eden Hindu Hostel proved to be of great advantage to me. Probably nowhere else could I have the facility to mixing so freely with Bengali students as I had in the Eden Hindu Hostel. My relations with them were always most cordial and friendly. I think the days I spent with them were among my happiest days. I picked up Bengali without an effort"[8].

Immediately after returning to Calcutta, Rajendra Prasad passed one examination in law and then started preparing for the other. For practising at the High Court one had to work as an apprentice to a lawyer for two years and then pass a test conducted by the judges. He wanted to be attached to a good lawyer and for this he was taken by a friend of his to Khan Bahadur Shamsul Huda. But Khan Bahadur could not then agree to this as he had already two apprentices with him and rules did not permit him to admit one more. He, however, arranged to place Rajendra Prasad with another able lawyer named Jahadur Rahim Zahid, who soon went to England, came back as a barrister and afterwards became a judge of the High Court and was generally called Justice Suhrawardy.

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[8] *Ibid*, pp. 56-57

For studying law thoroughly, Rajendra Prasad worked hard and for two years managed his own monthly expenses in Calcutta by working as a professor in the City College for some time and then by privately coaching the son of Justice Digambar Chatterjee. This also gave him an opportunity to be introduced to a judge before commencing practice at the High Court. Soon there was a vacancy with Khan Bahadur Shamsul Huda and Rajendra Prasad became his articled clerk. Rajendra Prasad stayed in a mess far away from the Khan Bahadur's residence. He had to go by tram car and then walk about a kilometre. Even then he reached his place at 7 A.M. and after working with him till 10 A.M. returned to his mess to take his meal before reaching the High Court at about 1 P.M. He prepared excellent notes for the Khan Bahadur, and in the High Court listened to the arguments in the cases with much attention, particularly those cases for which he had prepared notes. From the High Court he went to Bhawanipur; six kilometres from his mess, for the tuition and returned to the mess at 9 or 10 in the night. He thus "worked hard and learnt the work well"[9]. To relieve him of the inconvenience of long journeys Khan Bahadur later gave him accommodation in his own compound and even took him to the court in his own conveyance. "Our relations", writes Rajendra Prasad,

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[9] *Ibid*, p. 60

"became so intimate that he began to look upon me as a member of his own family"[10].

Maharashtra, like Bengal, was also a centre of significant socio-cultural movements from the mid-nineteenth century due to the activities of the Prarthana Samaj and the Deccan Education Society under the leadership of highly educated persons like M. G. Ranade, R. G. Bhandarkar, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Ganesh Agarkar and others. A highly significant event in the history of reformation in India was the establishment of the Servants of India Society by G. K. Gokhale in 1905, the object of which was to train "national missionaries for the service of India, and to promote, by constitutional means, the true interests of the Indian people". The motto and programme of the Servants of India Society made a deep impression on the mind of Rajendra Prasad when during his stay in Calcutta as an articled clerk, he met G. K. Gokhale along with Srikrishna Prasad of Monghyr who was also then a law student in Calcutta. But there was a turmoil in his mind for some days as to what would be the feeling of the members of his family who had placed high hopes on him, particularly that of his brother who had all along been so kind and affectionate to him, if he joined a philanthropic society whose members were to be such as were "prepared to devote their lives to the cause of the country in a religious spirit". In this extremely delicate position he could not have the courage to express his feeling personally to his brother, who was then with him in Calcutta. So, he wrote a letter to him in March 1910, seeking his permission to join the Servants of India Society. In that letter he laid his heart bare before his brother. He expressed his eagerness, inherent in his nature by virtue of the education he had received, for serving the motherland which, he said, was the only ambition he cherished in his heart. He narrated how he was influenced by Hon'ble Gokhale since the day he had met him and was requested to join the Society. In the letter Rajendra Prasad clearly analysed his own mind and the attitude of his elder brother towards him. He gratefully mentioned that his brother, who had taken the place of his father after the latter's death, was so dear to him that he could never dream that there could be any misunderstanding with him. He referred to another occasion in their lives when Rajendra Prasad had decided not to join the I.C.S. as he had felt that his activities would be circumscribed if he joined the service and his brother had agreed readily with him. He mentioned in his letter how the financial interests of the family would be adversely affected if he joined the Society as also how disappointed all the members of the family would feel as their hopes and ambitions were centred round him and as he was expected to be the future "bread-winner" of the family. Yet he requested his brother to consider that "......in this transitory world all passes away—wealth, rank, honour" and that "the greatest men in the world have been the poorest, at first the most persecuted and the most despised." He expressed the hope that his elder brother would prefer magnanimity of heart to mere accumulation of wealth or ease and comfort. He wrote, "...... although people may think that they are satisfied with gold, those who know anything know very well that happiness comes not from without but from within. .... So, care not for the scoffers and the contempt of the so-called social people who have not the magnanimity of mind and soul which enables a poor man to look upon them with the feeling of pity rather than contempt"

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[10] *Ibid*, p. 60

Taking into consideration the practical aspect of the result of his joining the Servants of Indian Society, he wrote that although he would not be of much financial help to the family, yet he would not require any money from his brother for his support, because that organisation would meet his expenses and would also give some money for the maintenance of the family which, he said, he would remit to his brother. As the Society used to provide for the education of the children of its members, he wrote, "I will not trouble you, therefore, with means for their education."

Rajendra Prasad's brother and some other members of his family did not favour this idea out of practical considerations relating to the family and he had to respect his brother's sentiments. He again wrote to him that he would abide by the decision of his elder brother in whom he had "found not only a brother but a father" and assured him that he would never give him or his old mother any pain. He mentioned in this letter that being impressionable and emotional he had expressed his eagerness to join the Servants of India Society, but what he had written was not his "final decision or any kind of decision". He assured his brother of his absolute obedience to him—"I have never disobeyed you—nor God willing—will I ever do so." He wrote that although he could not do away with the idea of sacrificing all for the sake of service to the motherland yet he would do as he would be bidden and would never cause his brother "any more sorrow". He reiterated his eagerness to continue his service to the country, and observed : "I shall do what little I can and shall be happy to see that you are all happy."

Persuasion of Rajendra Prasad's brother and the other members of the family prevented him from joining the Servants of India Society; but love of mankind had already penetrated his soul and the days were not far off when he would devote himself to the service of his motherland regardless of material considerations.

People in certain sections of life belonging to different parts of India had gradually realised the important role of the Congress in promoting national consciousness within a few years of its establishment. In its earliest days there "used to be a great deal of enthusiasm in Bihar about it and a large number of delegates used to attend the meetings of that body"[11]. For a few years there was a slackening of interest in the Congress in Bihar. But soon through the efforts of some enlightened and liberal leaders of the place, a Provincial Congress Committee was formed here in 1908 with Patna as its headquarters. From the same year, the Provincial Congress Committee held a Provincial Political Conference, which included among its members and delegates not only Congressmen but also some others who agreed with the Congressmen on matters of provincial interest.

Rajendra Prasad came to be associated with the Congress even when he was a student. He served as a volunteer in the annual session of the Congress held in Calcutta in 1906 and for the first time heard the speeches of Sarojini Naidu, Madan Mohan Malaviya and M. A. Jinnah. He was gradually attracted towards the Congress and joined it formally when another annual session of it was held in Calcutta in 1911. He was then elected a member of the All-India Congress Committee in recognition of his uniformly meritorious record as a student and his zealous participation in the Students' Conference.

Soon after this, Rajendra Prasad's mother died in his village home. His elder brother's daughter was married after some time. This caused him and his brother much anxiety as a "girl's marriage in our society is a nerve-racking affair" due to difficulties in the selection of a bridegroom of a good family and more on account of the evil custom of dowry which the bride's father had to pay. For this they had to incur a debt.

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[11] *The Beharee*, October 1, 1909

Rajendra Prasad started practising as a lawyer in August 1911 and on the first day got a case through the kindness of Khan Bahadur Shamsul Huda, who soon became a member of the Bengal Governor's Executive Council, later a Judge of the High Court and for some time also President of the Legislative Council. Rajendra Prasad appeared as a junior lawyer in a case in which Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee was a Judge. A man of cosmopolitan outlook with a unique gift for recognition of merit and scholarship, Sir Ashutosh as the Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, recruited best men as teachers, uninfluenced by extraneous considerations of any kind whatsoever. Rajendra Prasad's work in the case referred to above impressed him so highly that he appointed him as a Professor in the Law College though his experience as a lawyer did not extend beyond two years. He received much encouragement from Justice Digambar Chatterjee also. Sir Lawrence Jenkins, the then Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, who retired a year after Rajendra Prasad had started practice, was also highly pleased with him and at the time of his departure from Calcutta presented him one of his autographed portraits. Rajendra Prasad had then no rich clients. But Rai Bahadur Harihar Prasad Sinha of Arrah, who knew him and offered him help when he intended to start for England, entrusted him with "the entire legal work in respect of his zamindari" from the day he had started practice. While practising in Calcutta he soon came in contact with some other distinguished lawyers like Rash Behari Ghosh and Kulwant Sahay who later became Judges of the Patna High Court. He won a case in which Rash Behari Ghosh appeared for the opposite party. In a case from Bihar, in which he was engaged, the counsels on his side were Rash Behari Ghosh and Kulwant Sahay, and Sir S. P. Sinha was arguing for the other side. Rajendra Prasad prepared elaborate and thorough notes in the cases in which he appeared with Rash Behari Ghosh for which he won due appreciation.

Both Rajendra Prasad and Baidyanath Narayan Sinha, his old colleague in the Muzaffarpur College, who was also practising in the Calcutta High Court, soon decided to appear at the M. L. Examination in December 1915, and passed it, the former being placed in the First Class with high marks and the latter in the Second Class. They were the first two Biharis to pass this examination. As, according to University regulations, it was possible for one to get a Doctorate in Law after passing the M. L. Examination by submitting a thesis, they consulted Gurudas Banerjee regarding selection of subjects for this. Rajendra Prasad got the degree for his M. L. and a gold medal in January 1917. But he could not submit a thesis for the D. L. as he soon "found himself in the whirlpool of politics."[12] Two Judges of the Calcutta High Court before whom Rajendra Prasad had argued in a complicated case, and who were later transferred to the Patna High Court, were also highly impressed by him.

Rajendra Prasad gradually felt interested in studying Hindi from now. He was a student of Persian, read very little of Sanskrit, and his acquaintance with Hindi was only through his daily reading of the *Ramayana* before which he did not take his breakfast. He had offered Urdu as his language paper in his Entrance and F.A. Examinations, but in his B.A. paper in which an essay was also to be written in regional language, he offered Hindi and passed in it. He soon came into contact with many scholars and writers of Hindi in the cosmopolitan city of Calcutta. Among them were Jagannath Prasad Chaturvedi of Bihari Club, and another scholar, Umapati Dutt Sharma, Principal of the Vishuddhananda Saraswati Vidyalaya. He also participated in the activities of the Hindi Sahitya Parishad, which had been started in this city, and read some papers at its meetings which elicited appreciation from some scholars. All lovers of Hindi soon felt the need of an All-India Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. Its first session was held at Banaras under the presidentship of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, and Rajendra Prasad also attended it. The third session of this Sammelan was held in Calcutta in December, 1912, under the presidentship of Badrinarayan Choudhary '*Premghan*' and Rajendra Prasad was elected General Secretary of the Reception Committee. Owing to his preoccupation in this connection, he could not attend the session of the Indian National Congress which was held at Patna in the same month.

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[12] *Convocation Address delivered by Rajendra Prasad on December 26, 1952 when the degree of LL. D. Honoris Causa was conferred on him.*

Schooled under various wholesome factors at home and outside, with a mind chastened by sober and liberal education received under erudite scholars of high character, influenced by the invigorating forces of renaissant and awakened India, and through contact with persons occupying creditably positions of honour and dignity, Rajendra Prasad was inspired by lofty ideas for dedicated work in nobler spheres for the service of the community of man. He continued to be actively associated with the Bihari Students' Conference, attended every session of it and was elected President of its session held at Monghyr in 1913 in which certain recommendations in the Report of the Nathan Committee for a University in Bihar were opposed. In 1914

Bengal and Bihar were subject to the ravages of devastating floods. The city of Patna and its suburbs were inundated as the river Poonpoon was in spate. To afford relief to the afflicted people was a great need of the hour and Rajendra Prasad worked day and night for this humanitarian work with some volunteers. For several days he and his co-workers went out in the morning on boats to distribute food and clothes to the flood-stricken people and in the night they slept at the nearest railway station. The Bihar Seva Samiti was started at this time, "though on a modest scale", with the immediate object of helping the pilgrims to the annual Sonepur fair. Rajendra Prasad's brother was intimately associated with this Seva Samiti and worked as its President for many years. After the Bihar lawyers had migrated to Patna, they started a poor boys' fund through the generosity of some friends under the auspices of the Bihari Students' Conference. Shortly Rajendra Prasad took over the responsibility for the administration of this fund.

New Bihar had already come into existence with the creation of a separate province in April 1912, in response to the legitimate demand of the local people, though for legal cases they had yet to go to the Calcutta High Court. The Patna High Court began functioning from March 1916. Educational institutions here were under the control of the Calcutta University till the establishment of the Patna University in 1917. Rajendra Prasad, some lawyers of Bihar and some from Bengal, who were engaged in cases from Bihar, now began to practise at the Patna High Court. With the changed status of Bihar as a separate Province people here were naturally infused with a new spirit and public consciousness began to develop here rapidly from the memorable year 1912 when the Indian National Congress held its twenty-seventh session at Patna with the

Hon'ble Rao Bahadur R. N. Mudholkar as its President and Mazharul Haque and Sachchidananda Sinha as Chairman and General Secretary, respectively, of the Reception Committee. In 1914, these two eminent sons of Bihar were elected to serve on a deputation sent to England by the Congress along with Bhupendra Nath Basu, M. A. Jinnah, N. M. S. Samarth, B. N. Sharma and Lajpat Rai.

A burning question which greatly agitated the public in Bihar at this time was the Patna University Bill. Already by a resolution, dated May 19, 1913, the Government of Bihar and Orissa had constituted a Committee, with R. Nathan as its Chairman, to formulate a scheme for the establishment of a University at Patna for the Province of Bihar and Orissa. The proposals of this Committee were thrown open for public opinion and elicited much criticism from newspapers all over India and from non-officials and public bodies in Bihar and Orissa. The non-officials unanimously condemned them as a 'retrograde step'. There was a vehement agitation against the proposal to locate the University at Phulwari Sharif at a distance of about eleven kilometres from Bankipur. Rajendra Prasad "denounced it in the strongest of terms" on the ground that this would make education costly and difficult for students of average means. This view was shared by many others. Reiterating it, Ganesh Dutt Singh, Rajendra Prasad, Baidyanath Narayan Sinha and Badri Nath Varma communicated a note from Calcutta to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, in which they made the following observation : "We very much fear the recommendations are likely to result in the curtailment of the field of higher education, at least so far as the majority of those who generally avail themselves of it are concerned by raising the cost all round." Braj Kishore Prasad, President of the fifth session of the Bihar Provincial Conference held at Bankipur on April 10 and 11, made similar remarks in communicating the views of this Conference to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa on April 29, 1914. In the face of widespread opposition, this proposal was virtually dropped.

There were some objectionable features in the Patna University Bill. These were calculated to keep the Senate and the Syndicate under official control, there being no provision for inclusion in them of real representatives of the people. With the example of the Calcutta University before the leaders of the Province, they strongly opposed this feature in the Bill. Rajendra Prasad, then Joint Secretary of the Bihar Provincial Association, in cooperation with his intimate friend, Baidyanath Narayan Sinha, and some other colleagues, carried on a vigorous agitation with unflinching determination and courage against the objectionable features of the Bill by writing articles in the newspapers, bringing out pamphlets, addressing meetings and enlisting support of the Legislative Council members of other Provinces. To consider the Patna University Bill, a special session of the Bihar Provincial Conference was convened at Bankipur on November 25, 1916, under the presidentship of Purnendu Narayan Sinha, a distinguished lawyer and public man of Patna, who delivered a highly critical speech demanding deletion of the objectionable clauses of the Bill. This Conference passed a unanimous resolution registering "emphatic protest against the principles underlying the Patna University Bill" and recorded "its deliberate opinion that they are of a retrograde character and are calculated to retard the educational progress of the Province". The Bihar Provincial Muslim League also considered it to be "a highly retrograde measure".

In the face of the overwhelming opposition to the Bill from different quarters, the provisions, which were considered to be specially objectionable, were modified by C. Sankaran Nair, then Education Member of the Government of

India, in consultation with members from Bihar, when he introduced it in the Imperial Legislative Council on September 27, 1916. Mazharul Haque, Bihar's representative in the Council, kept the other leaders of the Province informed of these developments.

When the thirty-first session of the Indian National Congress was held at Lucknow in December 1916, Rajendra Prasad requested Surendranath Banerjea, R. P. Paranjpye (Bombay) and some other leaders to sponsor a resolution on the Patna University Bill in its open session. Paranjpye moved the following resolution : "This Congress places on record its emphatic protest against the highly retrograde character of the Patna University Bill and strongly urges that it should be so amended as to make it a thoroughly liberal and progressive measure." Seconded by L. A. Govindaraghava Aiyar (Madras) and supported by Dr. Neel Ratan Sarkar, Sachchidananda Sinha and Harkrishan Lal (Punjab), this resolution was passed unanimously. After the establishment of the Patna University, Rajendra Prasad was nominated a member of its Senate by the Governor of Bihar and Orissa. Soon after coming to Patna from Calcutta, Rajendra Prasad was elected as Assistant Secretary of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee and continued to hold this office for several years.

CHAPTER III

GANDHIJI'S MISSION IN CHAMPARAN

THE year 1916 is significant in the history of Indian nationalism for several reasons. Influenced by a new consciousness for the need of Hindu-Muslim amity as an essential factor for the progress of Indian nationalism, both the Congress and the Muslim League held their annual sessions at Lucknow in December 1916, and concluded the Lucknow Pact according to which the Congress agreed to separate electorates and both the organisations jointly formulated a scheme of reforms known as the Congress-League Scheme. This session of the Congress was marked by rapprochement between the Moderate and Extremist groups into which the Congress had been split up after its session of 1907. Lokamanya Tilak, leader of the Extremist Group, attended it and Annie Besant was also present. Tilak had started a Home Rule League at Poona in April 1916, and Annie Besant inaugurated a Home Rule League at Madras in September 1916. After the Lucknow session of the Congress both the Home Rule Leagues began to work together to facilitate the Congress-League Scheme.

Further, it was in this year that Mahatma Gandhi, who had returned to India in 1915 after his successful Satyagraha in South Africa, attended the Congress session for the first time. He did not take any prominent part in its activities. Probably he "was taking stock of the situation".[1] But the reputation he had already earned by his heroic fight for the cause of the oppressed Indians of South Africa led some of the Bihar delegates to the Congress to approach him to enlist his support for redressing a serious grievance of the indigo ryots of Champaran in North Bihar. The tenants of Champaran were under acute hardships and grievous anomalies of a grinding economic system. The grievance was there for years under the influence of a capitalistic system in which the foreign indigo planters in their inordinate lust for wealth and profit through extensive indigo cultivation and manufacture in this area and in total disregard of the interests of the poor and unsophisticated ryots perpetrated horrible cruelties upon them. Injustice was writ large in all the transactions of the indigo planters in Bihar. Public protests and press criticisms, mingled with the air due to the influence of the indigo planters and the ryots continued to groan under intolerable tyranny of the planters without any relief.

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[1] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 81

Among the many Bihar delegates who attended this session of the Congress were Braj Kishore Prasad, Rajendra Prasad and Raj Kumar Shukla, a peasant-leader from Champaran, who had gone there to represent the case of the down-trodden peasants of the area. How the Bihar delegates succeeded in getting a resolution on the Patna University Bill moved in this Congress has already been told. Some of the Bihar delegates, including Braj Kishore Prasad and Raj Kumar Shukla, requested Mahatma Gandhi to sponsor a resolution there on the indigo question. But he did not agree to it as he had till then no personal knowledge about the hardships of the indigo ryots in Champaran. "I can give no opinion", he said, "without seeing the conditions with my own eyes. You will please move the resolution in the Congress, but leave me free for the present." On the second day of the meeting of the Congress, Braj Kishore Prasad moved a resolution before it for the appointment of a committee of officials and non-officials "to inquire into the causes of agrarian trouble and the strained relations between the indigo ryots and the European planters in North Bihar, and to suggest remedies therefor". After this resolution had been unanimously passed by the Congress, some of the Bihar delegates, particularly Raj Kumar Shukla, who, in the words of Gandhiji, was "filled with a passion to wash away the stain of indigo from the thousands who were suffering as he had suffered", requested Gandhiji to come to Bihar personally and witness the miseries of the ryots. Rajendra Prasad was not in the company of the Bihar delegates who met Gandhiji at Lucknow. He came to know of it later.

At a session of the All-India Congress Committee held at Calcutta on April 7, 1917, Raj Kumar Shukla got an opportunity to meet Gandhiji once again. Gandhiji had assured him that he would visit Bihar as soon as possible. On April 3, 1917, he telegraphed to Raj Kumar Shukla that he would shortly go to Calcutta and that he should meet him there at the residence of Bhupendra Nath Basu. Accordingly, Raj Kumar Shukla contacted him in Calcutta and leaving that place on April 9, came along with him to Patna on the morning of the next day when he first took him to the house of Rajendra Prasad. Rajendra Prasad, though he was sitting just near Gandhiji at the meeting of the Congress, was unaware of all this and he had gone to Puri from Calcutta. Rajendra Prasad's man at his Patna house thought Gandhiji to be an ordinary client and arranged for his stay in an out house. But Mazharul Haque, who had previous acquaintance with Gandhiji when he was studying for the Bar, immediately offered his hospitality to him which he accepted with thanks and, requested that he should be sent to his destination by the first available train. The same evening Gandhiji went to Muzaffarpur with Raj Kumar Shukla and became a guest of Professor J. B. Kripalani. Next morning some local vakils came to see Gandhiji. One of them was Ram Navami Prasad, "whose earnestness especially appealed" to him[2]. After a conversation with them Gandhiji realised that the work of enquiry would take a long time and requested them to offer him out of love and spirit of service "clerical assistance and help in interpretation" as he did not understand the local dialect. This they readily agreed to do.

Gandhiji's object in coming to Bihar "was to enquire into the condition of the Champaran agriculturists and understand their grievances against the indigo planters". On coming to Motihari on the afternoon of April 15, 1917, with his two interpreters, Dharanidhar and Ram Navami Prasad, he went straight to the house of Gorakh Prasad, a local pleader, which became, as he tells us, "a caravanserai". But the planters and the Government officials thoroughly misunderstood the real nature and motives of his mission. They wrongly apprehended that there was "danger of disturbance of public tranquillity" and on April 16, when he was proceeding to a village to see the marks of pillage on the house of a man there, he was served with an order under Section 144 Cr. P.C. from W. B. Heycock, District Magistrate of Champaran, asking him to leave the District immediately. Just on returning to Motihari, Gandhiji wrote as follows to the Magistrate on April 16 in reply to the summons : "Out of a sense of public responsibility I feel it to be my duty to say that I am unable to leave the District but if it so pleases the authorities, I shall submit to the order by suffering the penalty of disobedience. I must emphatically repudiate the Commissioner's suggestion that my object is likely to be agitation. My desire is purely and simply for a genuine search for knowledge. And this I shall continue to satisfy so long as I am free."

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[2] *Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 498

The news of the notice served on Gandhiji "spread like wild fire". On April 17 a large crowd of peasants assembled at Motihari and recording of their statements continued the whole day. The assembled people remained perfectly peaceful. It was a triumph of moral force and a victory of the law of love. "It is no exaggeration but the literal truth to say", observes Gandhiji, "that in this meeting with the peasants I was face to face with God, *Ahimsa* and Truth." Gandhiji sent a telegram to Rajendra Prasad informing him of the events at Motihari and asked him to come immediately to him with volunteers. Braj Kishore Prasad came to Patna in response to a telegram sent to him by Rajendra Prasad, who accompanied by the former, Anugrah Narayan Sinha and Sambhu Saran started for Motihari next morning and reached there in the afternoon. Polak and Mazharul Haque also were there. Rajendra Prasad and others met Gandhiji at Gorakh Prasad's residence. Clad in an ordinary short Gandhiji smiled and told Rajendra Prasad : "So, you have come; you know I had been to your house." On recalling his servant's behaviour Rajendra Prasad felt somewhat embarrassed. But Gandhiji briefly narrated to him and his companions what had taken place there and in the Court. It was now that Rajendra Prasad had his 'first contact with Gandhiji'.

Already Gandhiji had received summons to appear before the Sub-divisional Officer at Motihari at 12 noon on April 18, 1917. The previous night Ram Navami Prasad and Dharanidhar had been asked by Gandhiji as to what they would do after he was sent to jail. The two interpreters were restless throughout the night with a conflict of feelings in their minds. Gandhiji kept himself busy in drafting letters to the Viceroy and to the leaders and a statement for the Court. But while proceeding to the Court with Gandhiji, both the lawyers burst into tears and told him that they had made up their mind to follow him to jail. Highly pleased at this, Gandhiji said, "Now victory is ours." Rajendra Prasad, and others who had come with him from Patna, also conveyed this decision to him in the evening of April 18 to follow the example of those two lawyers if Gandhiji was imprisoned. In accordance with his advice, a programme of action was drawn up to the effect that after his imprisonment Mazharul Haque and Braj Kishore Prasad would lead others. On their arrest Ram Navami Prasad and Dharanidhar would follow suit. When they too were arrested, Rajendra Prasad, Anugraha Narayan Sinha and Shambhu Saran were to guide others.

It was indeed a momentous decision on a significant occasion. "The 18th April, 1917", writes Rajendra Prasad, "is a memorable day in the history not only of Champaran, but of the whole of India. It was on this day that Mahatma Gandhi was preparing himself to go to jail for the sake of the poor and suffering people of the province of Bihar. On this day, the whole of India was to get her first lesson and her first modern example of Satyagraha which was to open new floodgates of light and of vision before her."[3]

Gandhiji appeared before the Court at the appointed time and made a statement before it in his own characteristic way. "I venture to make this statement", he said, "not in any way in extenuation of the penalty to be awarded against me, but to show that I have disregarded the order served upon me not for want of respect for the lawful authority, but in obedience to the high law of our being, the voice of conscience."

This unvarnished declaration of truth almost outwitted the officials, and the Magistrate fixed April 21 as the date for delivering the judgement.

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[3] Rajendra Prasad, *Satyagraha in Champaran*, p. 112

.On April 19, C. F. Andrews, a missionary in the true sense of the word, who had dedicated his life to the service of humanity irrespective of caste, creed or community, came to Motihari to see Gandhiji. The same day he saw the Magistrate, W. B. Heycock, who told him that the case against Gandhiji would be withdrawn by the Government and the officers would assist him in his enquiry. Rajendra Prasad and some others requested C. F. Andrews to continue his stay there by cancelling his proposed trip to Fiji, because they thought that the presence of a person like him would be helpful to them. When they sought Gandhiji's consent to this, the latter replied : "The more you press the Rev. Andrews to stay, the more I am confirmed in my view that he should leave on his mission to Fiji in general. You are afraid of the Government and the European planters. You imagine that if you have an Englishman in your midst, he will be a great support to you. This is the reason why you want him to stay. I want you to get rid of your fear of the Englishman and of your feeling that he is in any way different from you. You must have faith in yourself. Yes, the Rev. Andrews must leave tomorrow." C. F. Andrews left the place by the next available train. Such a fearless regard for truth which Gandhiji showed "had a great effect on our mental outlook", writes Rajendra Prasad.[4]

As a matter of fact, the unique utterances of Gandhiji produced a miraculous effect on administration. The stiffness of the bureaucratic steel-frame melted before his fearless and unflinching regard for truth and justice. On April 21, the Magistrate informed him in a written message that the Government had withdrawn the case against him. The Collector wrote to him that he was "at liberty to conduct the proposed enquiry" and that he "might count on whatever help he "needed from the officials". "The country had thus", remarks Gandhiji, "its first object-lesson in Civil Disobedience."[5]

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[4] *Ibid*, p. 122

Gandhiji's apostolic personality had begun to exercise a tremendous influence on the peasants. "In the eyes of the villagers", writes Rajendra Prasad, "Gandhiji had become a hero and they flocked to him in thousands to make their statements. We began recording the statements. Gandhiji asked us lawyers to be circumspect and use our skill in cross-examining in recording statements, so that whatever was recorded was true. So, our monumental work proceeded apace."[6]

Inspired solely by the spirit of dedication to the cause which Gandhiji had made his own, Gandhiji wanted to prevent it from "assuming a political aspect" and to avoid agitation of any other kind in the press or elsewhere. His was a silent and peaceful crusade for a noble work. He did not associate the Congress with it as many of the people of Champaran had no idea about it and both the Government and the planters misunderstood it. It was enough if they followed "the spirit of the Congress instead of its letter". "What we wanted", realised Gandhiji with his remarkable farsightedness, "was work and not name, substance and not shadow. For the name of the Congress was the *bete noire* of the Government and their controllers—the planters. To them the Congress was a byword for lawyers' wrangles, evasion of law through legal loopholes, a byword for bomb and anarchical crime and for diplomacy and hypocrisy."[7] As regards the press, he requested the editors of newspapers not to send to him any reporters as he himself

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5. *Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 507
6. *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 91
7. *Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 503

would communicate to them if it was necessary to give publicity to any piece of news. "Indeed the situation in Champaran was" as he felt, "so delicate and difficult that over-energetic criticism or highly coloured reports might easily damage the cause which" he was "seeking to espouse."[8] Even then the planters engineered "a poisonous agitation" against him and "left no stone unturned in maligning Braj Kishore Babu."[9] But Gandhiji's "extreme cautiousness" and "insistence on truth, even to the minutest detail, turned the edge of their sword."[10]

With his Bihari companions, Gandhiji went to Bettiah on April 22, 1917, and accommodated himself there in a *Dharmasala*. Here also statements were recorded of "crowds of persons". Further Gandhiji met the local S.D.O., W. H. Lewis, members of the Planters' Association and a number of planters as he wanted "not to irritate the planters, but to win them over by gentleness."[11]

To acquaint himself fully with the actual conditions under which the tormented ryots were living, Gandhiji, along with Braj Kishore Prasad and some others, visited several indigo factories and other places in the rural areas for a few days from April 24, 1917. He continued his enquiries unceasingly in spite of false and biased reports about these being fabricated and circulated by some Government officers and planters. High Government officers seemed to have been influenced by such reports. On receiving a telegram from the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa to the effect that he should see Hon'ble Mr. W. Maude, Member and Vice-President of the Executive Council at

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8. *Ibid*, p. 507
9. *Ibid*
10. *Ibid*
1. *Ibid*, p. 511

Patna, Gandhiji proceeded there on May 9 and had an interview with the latter on the following day. He did not agree either to the suggestion for removing his lawyer assistants or to stop the enquiry though he said that its method might be modified. He, however, expressed his willingness to send to the Government a report about his enquiry as soon as possible. On returning to Bettiah he despatched such a report to the Chief Secretary on May 13. Shortly after this Gandhiji received a call from Sir Edward Gait, the Lieut.-Governor of Bihar, to meet him. The reason for it was not clear to his co-workers. They apprehended that Gandhiji might be externed or interned under the Defence of India Act. Future plans of action were drawn up by Gandhiji. His workers were divided into two groups, one of which was to work from Motihari and the other from Bettiah, Rajendra Prasad being in charge of the Bettiah office Duplicates of all the statements of the ryots were prepared and these were kept in safe custody. Gandhiji sent telegrams to his wife, who was then in Calcutta, and to his son, Devdas Gandhi, who was then at the Sabarmati Ashram, to come to Ranchi. On receiving a telegram Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya had reached Patna on June 1 and Rajendra Prasad also went there. Reaching Patna with Braj Kishore Prasad on June 2, Gandhiji started for Ranchi the same day and Pandit Malaviya went back to Allahabad.

From June 4 to 6 during Gandhiji's interview with the Lieut.-Governor, Rajendra Prasad and the other workers were spending their days and nights in suspense. But the outcome of the interview was the appointment of a committee with F. G. Sly, Commissioner, Central Provinces, as Chairman, to enquire into and report on the agrarian conditions in Champaran. Gandhiji agreed to be a member of this Committee on the condition that he should be "free to confer with his co-workers during the progress of the enquiry, that Government should recognise that by being a member of the Committee" he "did not cease to be the ryots' advocate, and that in case the result of the enquiry failed to give him satisfaction", he "should be free to guide and advise the ryots as to what line of action they should take."

Gandhiji returned to Bettiah *via* Patna, on June 8 and the Committee of Enquiry started its work there from July 17. The first period of the Enquiry Committee's work was over by the middle of August and it was to meet again at Ranchi in September. In the meanwhile, Gandhiji went to Ahmedabad on receipt of a letter from Anasuyabai regarding some labour trouble there, entrusting the work in Champaran to Rajendra Prasad and Ram Navami Prasad. He returned to Ranchi on September 22 and Braj Kishore Prasad joined him there. "There we saw Mahatmaji", notes Rajendra Prasad significantly, "for the first time as a negotiator and peace-maker. He would not yield an inch on questions of principle but would go a long way to meet the planters on questions of details. His object was to obtain relief and at the same time to leave as little bitterness as possible."[12]

The Committee drew up a unanimous report and placed it before the Government of Bihar and Orissa on October 4, 1917. On the basis of this report was passed the Champaran Agrarian Act in March, 1918. It was a piece of humane legislation which afforded relief to the ryots of Champaran from a long-standing social injustice. It was, in a sense, a "moral victory"[13] for them.

Gandhiji's Champaran mission was of profound significance in other respects, too. The various social maladies which condemned the rural folk in general to a deplorable state of living pained him much. The most poignant evils among them were the unhygienic conditions and surroundings which made them victims of fell diseases and their colossal ignorance, which was certainly the greatest curse to man and prevented social or national progress of the right type. With growing experience of rural life in Bihar, he was convinced, as he himself tells us, "that work of a permanent nature was impossible without proper village education. The ryots' ignorance was pathetic."[14] So he planned to penetrate the villages, where he made noble experiments in social and educational work. For social work he recruited volunteers from Maharashtra and Gujarat where, for several years, organisations like the Prarthana Samaj, the Deccan Education Society, the Servants of India Society, later the Sabarmati Ashram and Karve's Widows' Home had provided them with training in activities for promotion of social welfare and progress of education. They did admirable work here by offering medical relief under the guidance of Dr. Dev of the Servants of India Society and by taking other steps to improve village sanitation and to infuse into the minds of the people a sense of corporate life. Schools were started in several villages, *viz.*, Barharwa Lakhansen, a village of the Bettiah Raj situated at a distance of 32 kilometres to the east of Motihari, Bhitharwa situated in the Nepal Tarai, 64 kilometres north-west of Bettiah, and at Madhuban. Education was imparted in these schools by teachers who were truly qualified for it by their character and learning. "My idea was", writes Mahatma Gandhi, "never to entrust children to commonplace teachers. Their literary qualification was not so essential as their moral fibre"[15]. Such teachers by working with missionary zeal and a sense of selfless devotion to the cause of learning created a profound impression on the minds of the local people. Rajendra Prasad observes on the basis of his personal experience : "The women of the villages became special objects of attention and the lady volunteers easily found entrance into their houses and soon won their confidence. Even grown-up women used to come to the Ashrams for instruction and *purdah* seemed to be distinctly dissolving. The women began to feel free. They started not only to learn spinning which some of them knew already and reading and writing, but also to join in village functions, such as *Ramayan* parties which used now and then to be held, and in the Ashram projects."[16]

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[12] Rajendra Prasad, *Mahatma Gandhi and Bihar*, p. 20

[13] *Ibid*, p. 23

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[14] *Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 513
[15] *Ibid*

Gandhiji had to leave Bihar in February 1918, in response to an appeal from Anusuyabai on behalf of the textile workers. He felt that his hope of putting "constructive work (in Bihar) on a permanent footing was not fulfilled". His scheme for cow-protection work which inoluded "cattle-breeding, improvement of stock, humane treatment of bullocks, formation of model dairies, etc.",[17] could not be implemented and his ideal of a non-affiliated rural university or college was not also realised. But he had a conviction that the few months' work in Champaran "took such deep root that its influence in one form or another"[18] was to be observed in later days.

The Champaran mission of Gandhiji was primarily humanitarian in aims, outlook and results. If effected emancipation of the tenants from the age-long tyranny of the indigo planters, secured them social justice and sought to eradicate some other rampant abuses which weighed heavily upon them. It also taught them fearlessness and regard for truth, which stood them in good stead during the successive phases of India's fight for liberty. Gandhiji's noble experiments for social uplift, education and amelioration of economic condition of common men, afflicted by grievous maladies in uncongenial rural environments, were indeed presages of effective movements for social reform which followed in the wake of India's struggle for freedom.

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[16] Rajendra Prasad, *Mahatma Gandhi and Bihar*, p. 32

[17] *Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 521

[18] *Ibid*, p. 517

Fight for social justice during this period also fostered a sense of nationalism. "The Champaran struggle was a proof of the fact", writes Gandhiji, "that disinterested service of the people in any sphere ultimately helps the country politically."[19]. Further, this movement proved the efficacy of non-violent Satyagraha for success in a just cause. Champaran proved to be the nursery of India's new nationalism. characterised by emphasis on moral values, non-violence and liberalism, social reform and eradication of economic abuses. "Here", we are told by Gandhiji, "Satyagraha had actually to be offered. Mere preparedness for it did not suffice as powerful vested interests were arrayed in opposition. The peace maintained by the people of Champaran deserves to be placed on record. I can bear witness to the perfect non-violence of the leaders in thought, word and deed."[20] Paying an eloquent testimony to the faithful cooperation of his Champaran assistants, he wrote to Janakdhari Prasad on March 6, 1925 : "I treasure the memory of the faithful co-workers of Champaran. I shall never have and never had a more faithful band to work with. If I had such bands throughout India, Swaraj would not be long in coming to India."

As for these workers, through their association with

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[19] *Ibid*, p. 508

[20] *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (G. A. Natesan & Co. 4th edition), p. 202

Gandhiji during this period, they imbibed a new spirit and a new outlook which had considerable effect on the whole Province of Bihar. From now commenced a 'revolutionary change' in the career of Rajendra Prasad. In fact he was initiated into a new life by undergoing a sort of moral discipline as a comrade of Gandhiji in the Champaran crusade. which proved to be a valuable asset for him as one of the noblest and most fearless patriots of our country. Rajendra Prasad and the other associates of Gandhiji at Champaran were persuaded by him to shake off their old prejudices about caste restrictions, as they were told that when they were engaged in works of public good they "became of one caste, namely, the caste of co-workers."[21] Rajendra Prasad thus refers to the change effected in their life by Gandhiji's inspiring example of liberalism and of plain living with high thinking : "When we first reached Champaran many of us had servants, we had a cook also. Within a short time the number of servants was reduced and shortly afterwards there was one servant left. The result was that those who had not in all their lives drawn one potful of water out of a well or washed a small napkin began, under Mahatmaji's influence within a short time, to help each other in bathing, washing clothes and cleaning utensils. In fact, we used to do everything ourselves. To sweep the rooms and floor, to clean the kitchen, to wash our own utensils, to carry luggage and other bundles from the station and the market— these and such other things we used to do and without hesitation. After the removal of the cook Kasturba Gandhi used to cook food for all of us and used to feed us all with motherly affection. It was one of the results of Mahatmaji's visit that we ceased to look upon travelling in a third-class compartment as a matter of indignity."[22] After finishing this work at Champaran they "returned home with new ideas, a new courage and a new programme" and "a wave of enthusiasm swept the province."[23]

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[21] Rajendra Prasad, *Mahatma Gandhi and Bihar*, p. 26

[22] Rajendra Prasad, *Satyagraha in Champaran*, pp. 201-202

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[23] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 100

CHAPTER IV

ROLE IN SATYAGRAHA

AFTER the outbreak of World War I in 1914 humanity was confronted with a gigantic challenge. At this moment of grave peril for the British Empire, India made enormous contributions in men and money and rendered valuable services to the allies in other respects. In acknowledging these, Lord Birkenhead observed : "Without India, the War would have been immensely prolonged, if indeed without her help it could have been brought to a victorious conclusion......... India is an incalculable asset to the mother country (Britain)." Speaking on September 9, 1914, Lord Haldane, the then Lord Chancellor of England, remarked : "The Indian soldiers were fighting for the liberties of humanity as much as we ourselves. India had freely given her lives and treasures in humanity's great cause; hence things could not be left as they were." Lord Chelmsford rightly pointed out : "The army in India has thus proved a great Imperial asset, and in weighing the value of India's contribution to the war, it should be remembered that India's forces were no hasty improvisation, but were an army in being fully equipped and supplied, which has cost India annually a large sum to maintain." Lloyd George observed in the House of Commons: "And then there is India. How bravely, how loyally, she has supported the British armies. 'The memory of the powerful aid which she willingly accorded in the hour of our trouble will not be forgotten after the war is over and when the affairs of India come up for examination and for action."

In return for all this, there was a natural expectation in India regarding due fulfilment of her national aspiration for self-government. Mahatma Gandhi observed in a speech delivered by him at Karachi on February 29, 1916 : "A new hope has filled the hearts of the people, a hope that something is going to happen which will raise the motherland to a higher status." At this period of acute crisis the British Government sagaciously felt the need of further support from India and E. S. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, made the following significant announcement on August 20, 1917 : "The policy of His Majesty's Government with which the Government of India are in complete accord is that of increasing association of the Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire." Expressing satisfaction over this promise the Indian National Congress at its annual session held at Calcutta in December 1917 under the Presidentship of Annie Besant, who had been released from jail, passed the following resolution on self-government : "This Congress strongly urges the necessity for immediate enactment of a Parliamentary statute providing for the establishment of Responsible Government in India, the full measure to be attained within a time limit to be fixed in the statute itself at an early date. This Congress is emphatically of opinion that the Congress-League Scheme of Reforms ought to be immediately introduced by the statute as the first step in the process."

This session of the Congress was attended by a large number of delegates from Bihar, particularly from Champaran. Rajendra Prasad and some others from Bihar put up with Gandhiji who had been accommodated at a place fixed for him by Jamnalal Bajaj. It was here that Rajendra Prasad met Jamnalal Bajaj for the first time.

Besides making the important announcement of August 20, 1917, Montagu had declared the British Government's decision to depute him to India "to consider with the Viceroy the views of local Government, and to receive with him suggestions of representative bodies and others". The Montagu Mission reached India on November 10, 1917, and Montagu, along with the then Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, met the national leaders of India. This was followed by the promulgation of a joint scheme of reforms, called the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, which after its publication on July 8, 1918, was embodied in the Government of India Act of 1919. The reforms, suggested in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, evoked strong protests from radical nationalists like Tilak and some others and also from Annie Besant. Annie Besant wrote in the *New India* : "The scheme is unworthy to be offered by England or to be accepted by India." To Tilak the scheme was "entirely unacceptable". A special session of the Congress, held at Bombay under the presidentship of Hasan Imam, a distinguished barrister and public man of Bihar, described the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals as "disappointing and unsatisfactory" and suggested certain modifications in them as "absolutely necessary to constitute a substantial step towards Responsible Government". It further held that the people of India were "fit for Responsible Government", repudiated "the assumption to the contrary contained in the Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms" and declared the view that for progressive realisation of Responsible Government "simultaneous advance" was "indispensable both in the Provinces and the Government of India". These reforms however, proved acceptable to the Moderates among the

Indian statesmen who decided in favour of working them.

Rajendra Prasad attended this special session of the Congress but "did not take part in its proceedings"[1]. Gandhiji could not attend the Bombay session due to his illness. On his way home Rajendra Prasad saw him at Ahmedabad and Sabarmati Ashram and formed the impression that "his views were fully in consonance with those of the Moderates"[2]. In Bihar, the Montagu-Chelmsford Report was earlier considered at a meeting of the Bihar Provincial Conference. Rajendra Prasad was "in agreement, in essentials, with the views of the Moderates"[3]. So he argued at the meeting that the Report "was fair and should be given a trial". Some opposed his views, but ultimately the Conference decided more or less according to the stand taken by him.

Besides dissatisfaction of a considerable section of our leaders with the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, several factors soon produced tremendous excitement in India. The adverse economic effects of World War I, such as soaring prices of articles of prime necessity and heavy taxation, caused immense hardships to the masses and aggravated national discontent. The Khilafat question, that is, the tragic fate of Turkey and her dismemberment in course of World War I for which Great Britain was considered to be very much responsible, agitated the minds of the Muslims in India and the Khilafat movement was organised here by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and the two brothers, Shaukat Ali and Muhammad Ali.

Further, Governmental measures of unmitigated repression to curb the spirit of nationalism added to popular discontent throughout the country. People were greatly shocked by the drastic and harsh provisions of the Rowlatt Bill which were based on the recommendations of the Indian Sedition Committee presided over by Justice S. A. T. Rowlatt, and were calculated to arm Government with extraordinary powers for ruthless suppression of national activities in the country and even denial of the legal rights and privileges of trial and defence to persons suspected by Government of complicity in what they would regard as political activities. There were protests against the repressive laws from different quarters. But Government turned a deaf ear to these and passed on March 21, 1919, the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act, which was a veritable challenge to the conscience and self-respect of Indians. At this Gandhiji gave a call to his countrymen to launch a nation-wide peaceful satyagraha on April 6 by observing a hartal, fasting and prayer and by holding meetings and taking out processions as a protest against the black Act. "The whole of India", noted Gandhiji, "from one end to the other, towns as well as villages, observed a complete hartal on that day. It was a most wonderful spectacle"[4].

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[1] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 102

[2] *Ibid*

[3] *Ibid*

Bihar made a splendid and spontaneous response to this national call. Protest meetings against the repressive laws attended by all classes of people were held in the month of March at Patna, Gaya, Monghyr, Muzaffarpur, Chapra and Bhagalpur. Rajendra Prasad, along with some others, signed the Satyagraha pledge and he got instructions from Gandhiji through letters. In a meeting held at the Qila, Patna city, on April 4, 1919, Rajendra Prasad and other prominent citizens of Patna took a decision to participate in the hartal on April 6,, "the day of humiliation and prayer". At another meeting held on the evening of April 5 and attended by Rajendra Prasad and several other prominent persons, the programme of work for April 6 was drawn up. Rajendra Prasad exhorted all to see that the procession to be organised on April 6 was orderly and peaceful. This procession, joined by a large number of men from all classes, was led by Hasan Imam. On his giving assurance that order would be maintained in the procession, the police were "kept out of evidence as much as possible"[5] and the procession "passed off very quietly". An officer of the local Government reported to his authorities on April 13, 1919 : "It is perfectly true that the Satyagraha observance of April 6 was a thoroughly well-organised and orderly affair." On reaching the Qila Maidan at about 5 P.M., the processionists held a meeting there under the presidentship of Hasan Imam. Rajendra Prasad and several others addressed the meeting. As regards the hartal, we know on the authority of Rajendra Prasad that at Patna "there was complete hartal—not a shop was open, not a vehicle was plying in the whole town from noon till evening. In villages the response was no less splendid and spontaneous. It was not only the shopkeepers who observed the hartal, but the agriculturists too did not work in their fields and plough cattle and draft bullocks were given a holiday. All this was so spontaneous !"[6] Hartal was observed also at Muzaffarpur, Chapra, Champaran, Monghyr, Gaya, Jharia and Katras.

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[4] *Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 562

Government had already started "a reign of repression" at Delhi (March 30, 1919) and at Amritsar (April 6, 1919). On his way to Amritsar, Gandhiji was arrested on April 15 at Palwal, a wayside railway station in Haryana, was sent back to Bombay under police escort and was released there. Then followed the ghastly Jallianwala Bagh tragedy and the proclamation of martial law in the Punjab by its Lieutenant Governor, Michael O'Dwyer, which subjected the people there to horrible atrocities and excesses. To "carry out the arbitrary will of the autocrat", special tribunals were set up which functioned as veritable engines of tyranny. Government machinery had no scruple in resorting to confiscation of properties, indiscriminate arrests, flogging and whipping, shooting and aerial bombardments. At Amritsar "innocent men and women were made to crawl like worms on their bellies"[7].

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[5] *The Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements in Bihar and Orissa* p. 2

[6] Rajendra Prasad, *Mahatma Gandhi and Bihar*, p. 37

The people of the Punjab bravely faced the enormities of 'Dwyerism'. But, as a reaction against these, a wave of national discontent had swept over the country.

After the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi on April 10, the citizens of Patna held a meeting on April 11 under the presidentship of Hasan Imam who explained Gandhiji's vow of Satyagraha. Rajendra Prasad and many others took this vow publicly. A registration office was opened at the house of Rajendra Prasad for those who wanted to take this vow. The inhuman atrocities of the Government in the Punjab were condemned at the meetings of the Patna Provincial Association and the Patna Bar Association in the month of May 1919, at a joint meeting of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee and the Bihar Provincial Association at Patna on July 19, 1919, and also at a separate meeting of the Bihar Provincial Congress at Laheriasarai in Darbhanga on August 17 and 18, 1919, in which Rajendra Prasad actively participated.

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[7] *Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 578

For enquiry into the Punjab incidents, the Government appointed a committee with Lord Hunter, an English judge, as its Chairman. The Congress also appointed a parallel enquiry committee. The reports of both the Committees were published at the same time in 1920 and the magnitude of the atrocities perpetrated by Governmental machinery in the Punjab deeply shocked the people of the country.

The Khilafat question fanned the flame of discontent among the Muslims in India and leaders like Shaukat Ali, Muhammad Ali and Maulana Azad, who had been released after war-time detention at the time of the Amritsar session of the Congress, formed Khilafat Committees all over the country. Many Hindus became members of the Khilafat Committee and many Muslims joined the Congress. The All-India Khilafat Conference, at a meeting held at Delhi on November 24, 1919, with Gandhiji as its President, adopted a resolution of non-cooperation with the Government. On November 30, 1919, a public meeting was organised in the Anjuman Islamia Hall at Patna to consider the question of participation in the forthcoming peace celebrations. In his speech Rajendra Prasad observed : "Let every man lay his hand on his heart and say if there is any reason for rejoicing in his mind." He felt that "any Indian, who had pondered over the present situation, would find only one response if he laid his hand on his heart, and that was that participation in the celebration was absolutely impossible. But even if after this they did not refrain, he could only say that they were the enemies of Government in that their action was calculated to keep the latter under a dangerous delusion as to the real attitude of the people"[8]. Some others also addressed the meeting and the resolution for non-participation in the peace celebrations was unanimously passed.

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[8] *The Searchlight,* December 4, 1919

The Khilafat movement gathered momentum, particularly from March 1920, due to the beginning of an anti-Turkish agitation[9] in England and the march of the Allies on the 16th of that month for military occupation of Constantinople. All this had repercussions in Bihar. Invited by the local leaders of the Khilafat movement, namely, Mazharul Haque, Dr. Mahmud and M. A. Sami, Shaukat Ali visited this Province and in the meetings held at Patna on April 24 and 25 he delivered stirring speeches explaining the programme of the non-cooperation movement and exhorting the people to make utmost sacrifices for the victory of their cause. Immediately after this, he visited Monghyr and Gaya. Rajendra Prasad attended the Patna meeting and in the course of his speech declared that he was ready to join the movement.

The other leaders of the country had also begun to think of non-cooperation and Gandhiji chalked out a programme for it. It was passed at a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee held at Banaras on May 30 and 31, 1920. Rajendra Prasad was present. It was resolved that a special session of the Congress be held not later than September 15, 1920, to consider this matter. But before this special session met, a highly significant resolution was passed at a meeting of the Bihar Provincial Conference which was convened at Bhagalpur on August 28 and 29, 1920, under the presidentship of Rajendra Prasad. On the eve of this Conference, Rajendra Prasad had received a telegram from Gandhiji supporting the programme for non-cooperation. In his Presidential Address, written out in Hindi, Rajendra Prasad "made a bold appeal for the acceptance of the programme". Many of the old leaders of the Province were against it. But it was advocated strongly by Braj Kishore Prasad, Dharanidhar of Darbhanga, Gorakh Prasad of Motihari and some others. Among the Muslims, Mazharul Haque, Shah Muhammed Zubair of Monghyr, Muhammad Shafi, Nurul Hasan, Ghulam Imam and others supported it. But Muslim leaders like Hasan Imam, Sarfaraz Husain Khan and some others were opposed to this view. The resolution on non-cooperation, moved by Dharindhar, was passed by an overwhelming majority. The Conference further resolved that "a committee be formed to formulate a practicable scheme suited to the conditions of the Province to give effect to the principle of non-cooperation." At the suggestion of Braj Kishore Prasad the demand for Swaraj was added "to the demands for justice in the Punjab and for restoring the Khilafat of the Muslim world". Prior to this, the Gujarat Provincial Political Conference had also passed a resolution on non-cooperation.

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[9] *The Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements in Bihar and Orissa*, p. 5

The special session of the Congress met at Calcutta from September 4 to 9, 1920, under the presidentship of Lala Lajpat Rai. It was attended by over three hundred delegates from Bihar and most of the prominent national leaders. Rajendra Prasad could not attend it as he was busy in the Burma case of Hariji for which his presence at Arrah was required. The session passed the resolution on non-co-operation by a large majority, about 180 of the Bihar delegates voting for it. The demand for Swaraj was included in the resolution. The Congress advised the people to carry out the following programme: (a) "Surrender of titles and honorary offices and resignation from nominated seats in local bodies; (b) refusal to attend Government levees, Durbars, and other official and semi-official functions held by Government officials or in their honour;

(c) gradual withdrawal of children from schools and colleges owned, aided or controlled by Government, and in place of such schools and colleges establishment of national schools and colleges in the various provinces; (d) gradual boycott of British courts by lawyers and litigants, and establishment of private arbitration courts with their help for the settlement of private disputes; (e) refusal on the part of the military, clerical and labouring classes to offer themselves as recruits for service in Mesopotamia; (f) withdrawal by candidates of their candidature for election to the reformed Councils and refusal on the part of the voters to vote for any candidate who may, despite Congress advice, offer himself for election; (g) boycott of foreign goods, (h) adoption of Swadeshi piecegoods on a vast scale and revival of hand-spinning and hand-weaving".

Even before the non-cooperation programme, adopted at the special session of the Congress, was ratified at the Nagpur session in December 1920, Bihar made an undaunted response to it. Rajendra Prasad gave up his practice as a lawyer except for appearing in the High Court in Hariji's case in view of his previous commitment regarding it. As for the other cases pending with him, he "returned the remuneration taken or entrusted the case to a friend or in some cases the clients left"[10] him. As regards the items for boycott of schools and colleges, he had some misgivings about its success though he was conscious of defects in education imparted in such institutions. His caution was due to his belief that "people educated in their national counterparts did not have alternative avenues of employment"[11] and the difficulties in starting such institutions were 'colossal'[12]. Mazharul Haque soon opened a National School with Ram Kishore Lal Nandkeolyar, a bar-at-law, as head master.

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[10] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 115

[11] *Ibid*. pp. 115-11-

[12] *Ibid*. p. 118

Having decided to join the non-cooperation movement, Rajendra Prasad resigned his membership of the Senate and the Syndicate of Patna University though he was a member of the Committee which the University had appointed to consider some reforms in the light of the recommendations of the Sadler Commission. His resolution on the use of the mother-tongue, as medium of instruction at least up to the matriculation standard, though opposed by some prominent members of the Senate, was carried by a majority. But it was not implemented. He also withdrew his candidature for the Legislative Council elections which were to be held in November 1920.

Early in December 1920, Gandhiji, accompanied by Shaukat Ali and Abul Kalam Azad, toured Bihar and addressed meetings at several places explaining the non-cooperation programme. He addressed the students in special gatherings and emphasised the need for boycott of schools and colleges controlled by Government. A National College was started by Rajendra Prasad and some others on January 5, 1921 in a rented house on the Patna-Gaya Road. Rajendra Prasad shifted there by vacating the house so long occupied by him. The courses of study in the National College were similar to those in the other colleges. Inspired by the new spirit of awakening, several school and college students, including more than a hundred students of the Bihar School of Engineering, had left their respective institutions by the end of the year 1920. The students of the Bihar School of Engineering received kind and sympathetic treatment from Mazharul Haque, who being a highly inspired patriot with apostolic faith in communal harmony, left his palatial building, Sikandar Manzil, on Frazer Road and went to stay with the boys at the site of what came to be called the Sadaqat Ashram. It developed as an 'abode of peace' and a centre for dedicated national service.

The National College was also shifted to this site and here was established the Bihar Vidyapith. On February 6, 1921, Gandhiji performed the opening ceremony of the Vidyapith and the National College. The Bihar Vidyapith was "to co-ordinate the activities of all the national institutions that had sprung up in the Province and to control them"[13]. National Schools had already been started in several places in Bihar. Mazharul Haque and Braj Kishore Prasad became Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, respectively, of the Bihar Vidyapith, and Rajendra Prasad continued as Principal of the National College. Badri Nath Varma of the Department of English of the Bihar National College, Patna, Jagannath Prasad of the Department of Sanskrit, Patna College, and Prem Sunder Bose of the Department of Philosophy, T.N.J. College, Bhagalpur, also joined it as professors after resigning their posts. Jagat Narain Lal, Ram Charitra Singh and Abdul Bari were also on its teaching staff.

Many delegates from Bihar attended the historic session of the Congress at Nagpur in December 1920 where the details of the non-cooperation programme were finally settled. Rajendra Prasad could not attend it due to illness. But the non-cooperation movement began to progress in Bihar rapidly under his leadership. He toured the Province in 1920 and addressed meetings at many places explaining the aims and objects of the movement. There was considerable awakening in Chhotanagpur and the Santhal Paraganas. From about March 7, 1921, Rajendra Prasad visited places like Dhanbad, Hazaribagh, Daltonganj and Ranchi. On March 21, he addressed a meeting at Ranchi and soon after this some persons organised a movement in the Khunti sub-division. "Public meetings", observes Rajendra Prasad, "were the order of the day in Bihar. There was not one little corner of the Province where the Congress message did not penetrate. Congress workers were active every day, explaining the Congress programme. The Province was agog"[14]. A Government report noted as follows: "The situation was most serious in the Tirhut Division where Muzaffarpur was the storm-centre. Between the January, 25 and the February 5 (1921) no less than 56 non-cooperation meetings were held in this district alone." As decided at the Nagpur Congress, the Provincial Congress Committee in Bihar was reorganised on the recommendations of a Reorganisation Committee of which Mazharul Haque was President and Rajendra Prasad Secretary. To carry the message of the national movement to the masses, a Hindi weekly, *Desh,* was started. It was edited by Rajendra Prasad and printed at *the Searchlight* press. *The Searchlight* had been started at Patna as a bi-weekly by some local leaders, namely, Sachchidananda Sinha, Hasan Imam, Braj Kishore Prasad and Rajendra Prasad. Sachchidananda Sinha and Hasan Imam were not in favour of the non-cooperation movement, whereas Braj Kishore Prasad, Rajendra Prasad and Murli Manohar Prasad (Editor of *The Searchlight*) were staunch advocates of it. For some time, out of practical considerations, *The Searchlight* 'followed the policy of non-alignment on the question of non-cooperation'. Later on Sachchidananda Sinha and Hasan Imam severed their conection with it and since then it became an organ of the Congress.

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[13] *Report of the Bihar Vidyapith. etc.*, 1921-26, pp. 4-5

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[14] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 127

Under the inspiring leadership of Rajendra Prasad and guidance of other national leaders of the Province people in large numbers did their utmost to implement the different items of the non-cooperation programme in the face of unmitigated Governmental repression and other risks. The leaders preached to the people the gospel of Swadeshi with unflinching zeal, pushed on temperance and anti-liquor campaigns and succeeded in forming Panchayats and Seva Samitis. It was mentioned in a Government report that "Panchayats had been established in a large number of villages in the following districts and were being established every day : Saran, Muzaffarpur, Champaran, Darbhanga, Patna, Gaya, Shahabad, Bhagalpur, Hazaribagh, Ranchi and Palamau". Rajendra Prasad stated in a report published in *The Searchlight* of March 16, 1921, that the number of Panchayats would be several thousands. The Panchayat courts tried cases. But at some places the people showed too much zeal and "social boycott was resorted to as punishment"[15].

To suppress the movement, the Government unleashed on a large scale all the forces of repression on the people. On January 31, 1921. G. Rainy, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, issued a circular containing orders for the Magistrates and Collectors to use all powers under various sections of the Indian Penal Code to curb the movement out and out. Devaki Nandan Prasad moved an adjournment motion in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council on February 28, 1921 to consider the circular which, as he pointed out, gave "a *carte blanche* to the men on the spot to use every means in their power"[16]. There were several other resolutions and questions in the Legislative Council on the repressive policy of the Government against the non-cooperation movement. H. Le Mesurier, while defending Government policy, made a flattering remark about Rajendra Prasad. But this made no difference to him who had completely dedicated himself to the service of the motherland. With the faith and conviction of a true patriot, he expressed his own opinion about Government policy in a long letter addressed by him to the Editor of *The Searchlight*.

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[15] *Ibid*, p. 135

After pointing out the incorrectness of some observations of Le Mesuirer (Member, Executive Council, Bihar and Orissa) in his speech in connection with the debate on a motion for adjournment in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council in February, 1921, he mentioned in this letter how "the whole atmosphere was surcharged with repression" and narrated the various objectionable steps taken by Government against the non-cooperators and their propaganda against the latter. These were, as he mentioned, circulation of false news regarding looting of *hats* by Congressmen, prosecution of persons who wanted to allay excitement and some others under section 107 or restraint on their movements under section 144, issue of a circular in which "the non-co-operators, *en masse*, were practically described as thieves and robbers, or abetters of theft and robbery", intimidation of the *panches* who were associated with the *panchayats* and prosecution of some of them, prohibition of public meetings "on frivolous grounds", dissuading people from attending these, holding of anti-non-cooperation meetings, employment of all the officers from the village *chaukidars* upwards including Rural Registrars to go round and discuss with the people, deliver speeches and to intimidate them even by "threats of shooting and firing" and by arranging march of troops and armed men through towns and villages, as also counter-propaganda of Government officers against prohibition by "encouraging people to drink". In conclusion, Rajendra Prasad observed that the non-cooperators were "carrying on a clean struggle and fighting a clean battle. ...their determination is grim and they are prepared to suffer the worst the Government can do in the way of suppression, repression and oppression".

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[16] *Proceedings of the B. & O. Legislative Council, Vol. I*, pp. 272-287

M. G. Hallett, Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, Ministry of Local Self-Government, also issued a circular asking the members and the office-bearers of Municipalities and District Boards "to refrain from any act which might be construed as supporting the non-cooperation movement". Rajendra Prasad's brother, Mahendra Prasad, who was Vice-Chairman of the Chapra Municipality and Member of the Saran District Board and Honorary Magistrate renounced his title and resigned his Magistrateship on March 24, 1921 as a protest against this circular. He, however, continued to work in the Chapra Municipality on the ground that he had been elected to it by the people.

Protesting against the circular, Rajendra Prasad wrote to the Editor of *The Searchlight* : "The circular further assumes that members of Municipal and District Boards are practically on the same footing as Government servants and lays down for them same rule of conduct towards non-cooperation as for its own paid servants. It is, of course, a preposterous claim to regard elected and nominated non-official members of District Boards and Municipalities as Government servants and it is beyond the authority of the Government to lay down for them any rule of conduct in their individual capacity. It is not open to the Government to lay down rules of conduct even for the paid servants of the District Boards and Municipalities. If our Municipal Councillors and members of the District Boards have self-respect and if they regard their own liberty of action as of any value, they ought to disregard this circular and not only continue to attend N.C.O. meetings, but also continue to take such active interest in it as they may have been taking."

Armed with the authority of the Rainy circular, the District Officers and the Sub-Divisional Officers used repression on a large scale in various ways. For example, E. O. Lee, Sub-Divisional Officer, Sitamarhi, adopted "reckless and indiscreet measures"[17]. Under Section 107 of the Criminal Procedure Code many were asked to furnish a security or in default to suffer imprisonment. But they courted imprisonment without offering a security. Section 144 was promulgated indiscriminately to ban meetings and processions. On hearing that Rajendra Prasad was to address a meeting at Arrah, W. Johnston, District Magistrate of Shahabad, passed an order under Section 144 restraining him from addressing any meeting or joining a procession at the Arrah town between 9 A.M. and 5 P.M. He got a notice to this effect on detraining at the Arrah station on February 17. So he proceeded to a locality outside the limits of the Arrah Municipality and addressed a meeting there. At 5.30 P.M. he went to Arrah town and addressed the scheduled meeting there. Devaki Prasad Sinha and Rai Bahadur Dwarka Nath put questions in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council regarding this matter. The former brought it to the notice of the Government "that this interference with the liberty of Babu

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[17] *The Searchlight*, February 20, 1921

Rajendra Prasad has caused universal resentment among the people of the Province". There was criticism in other Provinces also against this kind of high-handedness on the part of the Government. All this, however, went unheeded and repression continued in full swing.

With a new national urge and in the midst of tremendous popular enthusiasm, the All-India Congress Committee met at Vijayawada on March 31 and April 1, 1921. The Congress did not yet advise Satyagraha though Governmental repression was mounting high. But it asked the people to concentrate on the following three points chiefly with the aim of completing these by June 30 : (a) raising the All-India Tilak Swarajya Fund to one crore of rupees, (b) enlisting one crore of members for the Congress, and (c) introducing twenty lakh spinning wheels in cities and villages.

On their way back from Vijayawada, Rajendra Prasad and other Bihar delegates discussed among themselves in the train the programme they were to carry out in the Province. To create greater enthusiasm among the people, Rajendra Prasad issued the following appeal on the commencement of the Satyagraha Week from April 6, 1921 :

"The Satyagraha Week has come once again. It was on the 6th April that India recovered her soul. It was on the 11th of April that she had to go through the ordeal of fire. To-day she stands richer, nobler and purer. We have to make ourselves nobler and purer still. Let there be a searching of our hearts. Let there be no thought but of forgiveness, born of the determination to acquire the strength to forgive. Let us try to make our lives conform more and more to truth and *ahimsa* in thought, word and deed.

"The Congress Committee has laid severe tests and we have to get through it, if we are worth anything. In this

Province we have to raise 10 lakhs of rupees and to enroll 10 lakhs of members on the Congress register and to set two lakhs of *Charkhas* in good working order. Let the Satyagraha Week serve as the commencement of our endeavours in fulfilment of this obligation and let us raise two lakhs of rupees and two lakhs of members and start 40 thousand *Charkhas* within this week in the Province. If we succeed in doing this we shall have proved our capacity to do the rest of the programme before 30th June. The days of fast and prayers are for purifying the body and the soul. Let those and the other days in the week be utilised in acts of charity and sacrifice. Let reliable volunteers visit every home and appeal to all men and women to become members of the Congress and to contribute their quota to the Tilak Swarajya Fund. They can make up in a few days what they so contribute by taking recourse to the *Charkha*. In a Province with a population of nearly three crores, 10 lakhs of rupees and members ought not to be difficult to get in the sacred Satyagraha Week. It ought not to be difficult to find men to devote themselves to this work".

Patna duly observed the Satyagraha Day. There was almost a complete hartal in the city, and Rajendra Prasad made another stirring appeal to the people. He observed : "Just two years ago in the city of Patna they had observed the Satyagraha vow for the first time. On the 6th April, 1919, they had fasted the whole day and assembled in the maidan of the Qila by the side of the Ganges in lakhs and resolved not to rest till the Rowlatt Act was repealed. But they found that not only the Rowlatt Act was there but the country had changed so much during this short period and such problems had cropped up that they could not now be satisfied even if the Rowlatt Act was removed from the the Statute Book. At present they stood for *Swarajya* and nothing short of *Swarajya* could satisfy them. They wanted to have the safeguard so that Punjab and Khilafát troubles might not be possible again. They wanted the means to combat both the Police and the Army. They not only wanted to do away with the Rowlatt Act but they also wanted to have the right to make and unmake laws."

"Satyagraha", he said, "was a fight for righteousness. The Satyagrahi must not waver. must not be violent but should suffer for it. It was predominantly a movement for self-purification."

"The present movement of non-cooperation", he added, "was more important than Satyagraha. While the latter sought to remove a single act of injustice, the former wanted to solve the question of Khilafat and the Punjab and to prevent their recurrence and to secure the power. But, if the people were really earnest to win *Swarajya* they should prove that."

Rajendra Prasad and other local leaders again toured the different parts of the Province in spite of certain risks and transport difficulties involved in the journey. By their enthusiastic work they were able to collect by June 30 Rs. 7½ lakhs[18] for the Tilak Swarajya Fund, to enrol a large number of members and to introduce more *Charkhas* for Khadi work. Further, by the end of June the Provincial Congress Committee was reorganised on the lines suggested at the Nagpur session of the Congress. The District Congress Committees had elected members to the Provincial Congress Committee and soon afterwards the Provincial Congress Committee held elections for membership of the All-India Congress Committee. When the All-India Congress Committee, elected according to the new rules, met in July 1921, Bihar got a seat on the All-India Congress Committee.

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[18] Rajendra Prasad, *Mahatma Gandhi and Bihar*, p. 47

Growing represion on the part of the Government impelled the leaders and many people to start Satyagraha without delay. But Gandhiji still advised them to "hasten slowly." He urged "patience and determined concentration on Swadeshi" upon those who were to "embark on mass civil disobedience". Meeting at Bombay from July 28 to 30, 1921, the All-India Congress Committee passed a resolution for concentrating attention "upon attaining complete boycott of foreign cloth by September 30 next and on manufacture of *Khaddar* by stimulating hand-spinning and hand-weaving". It passed another resolution to boycott the forthcoming visit to India of the Prince of Wales.

On July 31, 1921, Gandhiji made a bonfire of foreign cloth at Umar Sobani's yard at Parel (Bombay). Bihar also formally inaugurated the boycott of foreign cloth on August 1, by burning some quantity of foreign cloth. The death anniversary of Lokamanya Tilak was observed here on that day by organising processions and meetings at all important places.

But before Bihar could concentrate on the boycott of foreign cloth and the production of *Khaddar,* Gandhiji, accompanied by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Muhammad Ali and some others, toured for seven days the Shahabad, Gaya and Patna Districts in August 1921 to help the people maintain communal harmony during the approaching Bakr-Id festival. Owing to the influence of his personality and his soul-stirring speeches, Bakr-Id passed off peacefully and the boycott of foreign cloth and the production of *Khaddar* then engaged the sole attention of the leaders and other Congress members here. Later, Gandhiji and those who accompanied him went to the Sadaqat Ashram, Patna, where the newly formed Working Committee of the All-India Congress held a meeting on August 16, 1921 Rajendra Prasad attended it as a member. The Committee passed several resolutions, the most important of which was regarding the boycott of foreign cloth. The Bihar Provincial Congress Committee also held a meeting at Patna towards the end of August and decided to take effective steps to further this work. Rajendra Prasad undertook a tour of Bihar "spreading", as he says, "the message of the spinning-wheel".[19] To promote the cause of Khadi, a committee was constituted by the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee with representatives from the districts. From Bihar, Gandhiji proceeded to Assam and then went to Calcutta to attend the meeting of the Congress Working Committee. Rajendra Prasad also attended it. In August, the latter organised some relief work at Chapra to save the people of the district from the ravages of flood.

To counteract the movement for the boycott of foreign cloth, J. D. Sifton, Officiating Chief Secretary of Bihar and Orissa, had issued a circular on August 3, 1921 suggesting the following : (a) "A vigorous campaign of propaganda should be started in order to make people realise that as India produces less cloth than her population requires, the boycott of foreign cloth must inevitably lead to an immediate and serious rise in prices and may lead to disorder and looting......., (b) an assurance of support and protection should be given to importers and dealers who are opposed to the boycott movement and every effort should be made to give effect to the assurance". Arrest of the Congressmen, when necessary, was also ordered. Steps were taken by the Government against the temperance movement and Sifton issued on September 26, 1921 specific orders for propaganda work on behalf of the Government.

Undaunted by such measures, the Congress workers in Bihar, however, continued their constructive activities, and the leaders held meetings to promote them. Such meetings were addressed by Rajendra Prasad at Begusarai and Gogri on September 4 and 5, 1921. Accompanied by Lala Lajpat Rai he went to Bhagalpur on September 10 and to Monghyr on the September 11. Both of them addressed well-organised meetings at these places and called upon the people to boycott foreign cloth and to use *Khaddar*.

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[19] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 139

Events were moving fast to aggravate people's discontent, particularly after the arrest of the Ali brothers, Shaukat Ali and Muhammad Ali on September 14, and to accelerate the growth of a spirit of passive resistance and civil disobedience in the country. Meetings were held all over the Province of Bihar supporting the Karachi resolution of July 8, 1921. A meeting of the Bihar Provincial Conference was held at Arrah at the beginning of October 1921 under the presidentship of Maulavi Muhammad Shafi. Rajendra Prasad took part in it only for a day as he had to leave for Bombay on October 2 to attend a meeting of the Working Committee on October 4. The Conference passed resolutions protesting against the Sifton circular, endorsing the Karachi resolution for boycotting the visit of the Prince of Wales, and for carrying on propaganda regarding Swadeshi. As regards Civil Disobedience, it passed a resolution requesting the Congress Working Committee and Mahatma Gandhi "to permit them in Bihar to start Civil Disobedience and to specify the items which might be taken up"[20].

Rajendra Prasad was one of the signatories to the manifesto prepared by the Congress Working Committee on October 4, which appeared in the press the following day : "In view of the prosecution of the Ali Brothers and others for the reasons stated in the Government of Bombay's communique dated the 15th September, 1921, we, the undersigned, speaking in our individual capacity, desire to state that it is the inherent right of everyone to express his opinion without restraint about the propriety of citizens offering their services to, or remaining in the employ of, the Government whether in the Civil or the Military Department. We are also of opinion that it is the duty of every Indian soldier and civilian to sever his connection with the Government and find some other means of livelihood"[21].

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[20] *The Searchlight*, October 7, 1921

Meeting at Delhi on November 4 and 5, 1921, the All-India Congress Committee authorised "every province on its own responsibility, to undertake Civil Disobedience including non-payment of taxes." For this the conditions were that in the "event of Civil Disobedience the individual must know hand-spinning and must have completely fulfilled that part of the programme which is applicable to him or her, *e.g.* he or she must have entirely discarded the use of foreign cloth and adopted only hand-spun or hand-woven garments; must be a believer in Hindu-Muslim unity and in unity among all communities professing different religions in India as an article of faith; must believe in non-violence as absolutely essential for the redress of Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs and the attainment of Swaraj; and, if a Hindu, must by his personal conduct show that he regards untouchability as a blot upon nationalism."

Gandhiji thought of experimenting the new campaign under his own guidance in Bardoli, one of the taluks in the district of Surat in Gujarat and appealed to all to observe perfect peace. Unfortunately there were mob excesses at Bombay when the Prince of Wales landed there on November 17. But there were peaceful hartals at other places.

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[21] M. R. Jayakar, *The Story of My Life—I*, pp. 449-450

Very much pained at what had happened in Bombay, Gandhiji observed a fast from November 19 and continued it till November 22, when the situation became quiet. He postponed the Bardoli campaign. Meeting at Bombay, the Working Committee of the Congress reiterated the need for maintaining peace as an essential condition of Civil Disobedience and passed a resolution for enrolment of volunteers "pledged to the strictest observance of non-violence", for which the provinces were to organise Sevak Dals.

In Bihar, some like Jagat Narain Lal and Krishna Prakash Sen Sinha advocated immediate launching of Civil Disobedience. But Rajendra Prasad and some others insisted on due preparations being made before doing so. Meeting at Patna on November 27, 1921 the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee decided that either Basantpur *thana* in the Chapra district or Katra in the Muzaffarpur district would be selected for starting Satyagraha. The Congress workers in Chapra pressed for this privilege as they claimed to have made all preparations. After an enquiry made by Maulavi Muhammad Shafi and some others on behalf of the Provincial Congress Committee, the claim was found to be justified. It was at the meeting of November 27, that the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, in accordance with the instructions of the Working Committee of the Congress, formed a Sevak Dal (Bihar National Volunteer Corps). Its "foremost duty was to keep peace in the Province." At this time Lord S. P. Sinha resigned his office as Governor of Bihar and Orissa with effect from November 29 and Sir Havilland Le Mesurier, the Senior Member of the Executive Council, succeeded him as acting Governor.

To arrest further progress of the movement, the Government began to follow a more ruthless policy of repression. By making use of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act and the Seditious Meetings Act, they declared Congress

Sevak Dals unlawful, banned public meetings and arrested most of the prominent national leaders like C. R. Das, Lala Lajpat Rai, Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad and C. Rajagopalachari. In Bihar also large scale arrests were made, Congress offices were raided and their records seized. But in view of compromise negotiations of Lord Reading with Mahatma Gandhi and also with C. R. Das, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and some others in jail, the Government temporarily relaxed the stringency of their measures. So, Rajendra Prasad, Braj Kishore Prasad and Mazharul Haque were not arrested though they declared themselves to be members of the Sevak Dals. Rajendra Prasad condemned Governmental repression and issued a statement encouraging people to enrol themselves in the Sevak Dals.

Government's gesture for conciliation was probably due to their desire to keep the political atmosphere in the country undisturbed during the visit of the Prince of Wales. But when the Prince of Wales went to Patna on December 22, and 23, the local people observed a complete hartal though the Moderates and the Loyalists greeted him. Hartal was observed in many other cities of the Province in a peaceful manner.

The Indian National Congress held its thirty-sixth session at Ahmedabad on December 27 and 28, 1921. It was attended by 558 delegates from Bihar, of whom 22 including Rajendra Prasad were members of the Subject Committee. As the President-elect, C. R. Das, was behind the bars, Hakim Ajmal Khan was voted to the Chair. The main resolution moved by Mahatma Gandhi in a memorable speech and passed by the Congress placed "on record the fixed determination of the Congress to continue the programme of non-violent non-cooperation with greater vigour than hitherto, in such a manner as each province may determine, till the Punjab and the Khilafat wrongs are redressed and Swaraj is established, and the control of the Government of India passes into the hands of the people from that of an irresponsible corporation". It called upon all, in view of the repressive policy of the Government, "quietly and without any demonstration, to offer themselves for arrest by belonging to the Volunteer Organisations". It also advised that committee meetings and even public meetings may be held in spite of Government prohibition, with proper precautions against provocation or violence of any kind. Affirming that the "Civil Disobedience is the only civilised and effective substitute for an armed rebellion", it advised Congress workers and others who had faith in peaceful methods "to organise individual Civil Disobedience and mass Civil Disobedience, when the mass of the people have been sufficiently trained in the methods of non-violence". Apprehending immediate arrest of its workers, the Congress made Gandhiji its sole 'executive authority', and gave him the full authority of the All-India Congress Committee, including the power to appoint a successor in case of emergency, except that he or his successor could not "conclude any terms of peace with the Government of India or the British Government" nor could he modify the national creed without the previous approval of the Congress.

A few days after the Bihar leaders had returned from Ahmedabad, there was a meeting of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee at Patna on January 5, 1922 to consider the ways of implementing the Congress resolutions. It was decided that instead of starting Civil Disobedience immediately, efforts should be concentrated for the time being on the recruitment of volunteers. Gandhiji had also decided to start Satyagraha first at Bardoli instead of launching a country-wide mass Civil Disobedience. But he had to suspend this decision because of an unfortunate incident at Chauri Chaura in the Gorakhpur district of U.P., where on February 5, 1922, during a clash between the people and the police an excited mob had burnt the police station and killed a number of policemen.

An emergency meeting of the Congress Working Committee was held at Bardoli. While addressing a public meeting in the village of Pupri in the Muzaffarpur district, Rajendra Prasad got a telegram asking him to attend the Bardoli meeting. He at once started for that place but before he could reach there, the Congress Working Committee had met there on February 11 and 12, and had passed a resolution suspending mass Civil Disobedience till there was perfect non-violence in the country. Rajendra Prasad heard of this resolution at the railway station of Bardoli from Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. This decision at first 'shocked' Rajendra Prasad and he hastened to the residence of Gandhiji. But after a discussion with Gandhiji he felt that his "attitude was correct"[22]. As penance for "the crime of Chauri Chaura", Gandhiji observed a fast for five days from February 12. The Bardoli decision caused a sense of despondency among many Congressmen, even among leaders like Motilal Nehru, Lala Lajpat Rai and some others in prison. When the All-India Congress Committee met at Delhi on February 24 to consider the Bardoli resolutions, Dr. Moonje moved an alternative resolution which, however, was defeated. The Bardoli resolutions were confirmed with an addition to the effect that "individual Civil Disobedience, whether of a defensive or aggressive character, may be commenced in respect of particular places or particular laws at the instance of and upon permission being granted therefor by the respective Provincial Congress Committees". Further, the right of picketing foreign cloth shops as well as liquor shops could be exercised with the previous permission of the Provincial Congress Committees.

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[22] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 163

When there was considerable excitement throughout the country, Gandhiji was arrested on March 10, and was taken to the Sabarmati Jail. Immediately on hearing of it, Rajendra Prasad started for Sabarmati to be present in time during the trial of Gandhiji in the court of the Sessions Judge. The Judge sentenced him to six years' imprisonment. "After the Judge left the Court, we all went to Gandhiji", writes Rajendra Prasad, "to bid him goodbye. It was a very touching scene. I burst into tears and it was with great difficulty that I could control myself after a while and take leave of Gandhiji"[23].

Besides suspending Civil Disobedience, the Bardoli session of the Congress formulated a detailed programme [illegible] constructive work. According to Gandhiji's instructions, the Congress workers in Assam had organised an anti-opium campaign to remove the evil of excessive addiction to opium among some people. In this connection, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Rajendra Prasad visited Assam and addressed meetings to impress upon the local people the need for eradicating the evil. Rajendra Prasad toured some villages. He felt that their "tour was a great success"[24].

On hearing of terrible repression in the district of Santhal Parganas, particularly in the Damin-i-Koh area, Rajendra Prasad proceeded there with some volunteers in the hot months of 1922. He first went to Pakur. The local people were "much too terror-stricken even to meet" them. But a local gentleman, who knew Rajendra Prasad since he had been practising at the Patna Bar, offered him his hospitality. After taking rest for a short while, Rajendra Prasad met the political prisoners in the jail and addressed public meeting in the evening. He went to Dumka where also the people did not offer him hospitality out of fear and he had to stay in a *dharmasala*. On returning to Patna, Rajendra Prasad prepared an account of the police atrocities in the Santhal Parganas, which was published in the Bihar papers.

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[23] *Ibid*, p. 168

[24] *Ibid*. p. 176

In the months of August-September 1922, two incidents in the Punjab drew Rajendra Prasad to that area along with some other national leaders. One was the Satyagraha of the Sikhs in connection with some property of the Mahant of the Gurdwara at Guru-ka-Bagh, a place near Amritsar. The other incident was a terrible Hindu-Muslim riot in Multan. As a result of their visit, writes Rajendra Prasad, "tension eased in Multan and the two communities started repairing the damage done and promoting goodwill"[25].

The Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee, appointed by the Congress in 1922, visited Bihar in the month of August and interviewed prominent leaders of the Province. The Committee as a whole did not consider launching of Civil Disobedience practicable at that time, and half of its members including Pandit Motilal Nehru, Hakim Ajmal Khan and V. J. Patel were in favour of entering the Councils.

Rajendra Prasad expressed his view[26] that they should show a way which was acceptable to all and which all could justly follow. It felt that despite the sharp difference of opinion, all should accept the decision of the Congress if it did not go against their conscience. He drew the attention of the non-co-operators to the appeal made by the members to all the lovers of the country in the following words :

> "Whatever line of action is eventually taken in this and other matters, non-co-operators must, in any case, be

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[25] *Ibid*, p. 182

[26] *The Searchlight*, November 15, 1922

> prepared to undergo much greater sorrow and suffering than they have so far endured. Terrible as it has been, the struggle is prolonged. The end is not in sight. But unless the laws of nature are reversed and the lesson of history belied, freedom's battle has only one ending whenever it comes and that a glorious victory. Differences must, from time to time, arise about the method to be adopted and the course to be followed. Such differences arising from a healthy and vigorous growth need cause no alarm. Individual views on other matters of principle or friction may vary from time to time but loyalty to Congress must remain the first and last unalterable article of faith with every true Congressman".

An important event in the history of Bihar in the year 1922 was the holding of the 37th annual session of the Congress at Gaya in December. To make suitable arrangements for such an august assembly of 20 to 25 thousand delegates was indeed a stupendous task. To collect adequate funds for such work was a particularly difficult matter. Rajendra Prasad was not in favour of incurring any liability till funds were available. So, pending formation of the Reception Committee till membership of the Congress had increased, a small committee was formed with Rajendra Prasad as its Secretary and Anugraha Narayan Sinha as a member. All handicaps were soon overcome due to the inspiring guidance of Rajendra Prasad, valuable assistance of the most prominent local leaders, Anugraha Narayan Sinha and Shrikrishna Prakash Sen Sinha, and earnest efforts of the Congress workers of the Province. A Reception Committee was formed with Braj Kishore Prasad as Chairman. A large number of Oraons, Mundas and Tana Bhagats, who had deep faith in the Congress, attended its session at Gaya walking nearly 322 kilometres from Ranchi and the neighbouring places.

Deshbandhu C. R. Das was President of this session of the Congress. The most debated question in the session was that of 'Council Entry' to follow a plan of "uniform, consistent and continuous obstruction for mending or ending" the new Constitution by entering the Central Legislative Assembly and the Provincial Councils. Deshbandhu Das strongly advocated it in his brilliant presidential address and it was discussed threadbare for two days. But the majority, including Rajendra Prasad, opposed it, and Andhra, Bihar, Madras and Orissa continued to follow the 'no-change' policy.

The Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee had submitted its report on all items of the Non-Cooperation Movement including Satyagraha and the no-tax campaign. Without much difference of opinion, the Gaya Congress adopted resolutions on three subjects, on the boycott of courts and Government educational institutions and on the need for popularising Khadi. The resolution on preparing the country to start Civil Disobedience called upon the people "to take immediate steps for the collection of at least 25 lakhs of rupees for the Tilak Swarajya Fund and enrolment of at least 50,000 volunteers."

Another important resolution passed by a majority in this session was that free India would have no obligation for any loan or liability incurred from that date by the British Government without consulting the Indian Legislative Assembly. In the Gaya Congress, Rajendra Prasad moved resolutions on boycott of government and government-aided or affiliated educational institutions, and on the Near-East situation.

At the time the Congress met at Gaya, some other organisations held their meetings there. These were the Khilafat

Conference, the Jamait-ul-Ulema Conference, the Hindu Mahasabha, the All-India Social Conference, the Bharat Dharma Mahamandal and the All-India Sanatan Dharma Association. Both the Khilafat and the Jamait-ul-Ulema Conferences discussed the controversial question about Council entry but decided to adhere to their decision to boycott the Councils. At the request of many persons, Rajendra Prasad became Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Hindu Mahasabha, and pressed by some, he persuaded Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya to be its President. Later on, when differences arose between the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, Pandit Malaviya told Rajendra Prasad that the latter was responsible for laying the foundation of the Hindu Mahasabha at Gaya and it was at his instance that he had accepted the Presidentship of the session. Rajendra Prasad never disowned his responsibility for his role at that session of the Hindu Mahasabha. He noted in his autobiography that he found nothing objectionable in joining the Sabha's Gaya session as even the Muslims of Gaya did not find anything wrong in it.[27]

After the Gaya Congress, Rajendra Prasad became its Secretary and during his tenure the office of the Congress was located at Patna. He delivered a forceful speech in a meeting held at Gulabbag, Patna on January 26, 1923, explaining to the people the prevailing political situation in the country and exhorting them to continue the movement for freedom with greater vigour and determination by making sacrifices of all kinds for it. Owing to the pressure of other heavy work, Rajendra Prasad resigned the Editorship of the Hindi weekly, *Desh,* on January 27, 1923 and Ramanand Singh succeeded him.

Meeting at Bombay on January 30, 1923, the Congress

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[27] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 182

Working Committee passed the following resolution : "Resolved that the 18th March, 1923, being the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhiji's incarceration, should be observed throughout the country as a day of sacrifice and prayer in a befitting manner, and that the Working Committee calls upon the people of India to observe a peaceful hartal throughout the country on this day. It is further resolved that in places where that happens to be the New Year's Day, business should be suspended at least after 12 noon, that meetings should be held in all places to record the country's determination to carry out its non-violent struggle until its demands are conceded and that the whole week, from the 10th day of Mahatma's arrest to the 18th, the day of his conviction, should be devoted to concentrated efforts for collection for the Tilak Swarajya Fund, enrolment of volunteers and propagation of *Khaddar*."

As General Secretary of the Congress, Rajendra Prasad communicated this resolution to the Provincial Congress Committees.

By acting enthusiastically according to the decision of the Gaya Congress, workers of the Congress organisation in Bihar were able to enrol about 4,000 volunteers and to collect Rs. 41,000 for the Tilak Swarajya Fund by May 1923.[28] The Bihar Provincial Congress Committee at its meeting held at Monghyr in April 1923, under the Chairmanship of Braj Kishore Prasad, decided to contest all the seats in the Municipalities and the District Boards of Bihar. and to facilitate proper activities in this respect, it formed a committee consisting of Rajendra Prasad, Shrikrishna Singh (Convener), Maulavi Muhammad Shafi, Bepin Behari Varma and Tajeshwar Prasad, with power to co-opt other members.

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[28] *The Searchlight*, June 6, 1923

At this time Rajendra Prasad participated in the heroic Satyagraha at Nagpur, launched in defence of the honour of India's national flag, under the leadership of Pandit Sunder Lal, the then President of the C. P. Congress Committee. The Satyagraha originated at Jabalpur following the objection of the Government to the hoisting of the national flag over the municipal building. The movement soon spread to Nagpur after the Government had banned processions with national flags within the Civil Lines of that city by an order of May 1, 1923. Seth Jamnalal Bajaj assumed its leadership and after his arrest Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel came forward to guide it from July 10. The Nagpur Satyagraha soon attracted the attention of national workers in other parts of the country and many of them hurried to Nagpur to vindicate the honour of the national flag. Bihar not only made contributions to the fund that was collected for carrying on this national struggle at Nagpur but also hundreds of its people went there as volunteers under the leadership of Rajendra Prasad. Many of them courted imprisonment and one named Hardeo Narayan Singh died a martyr in the Nagpur Jail. It was on this occasion at Nagpur that Rajendra Prasad had more intimate contact with Sardar Patel. "I cherish his friendship", he writes, "as one of the most pleasant memories of my life. His gravity, efficiency, and qualities of leadership inspired in me a deep regard which was to increase with greater association. I won his love and confidence and he was always affectionate to me and to Bihar"[29].

Bihar celebrated the Flag Day on July 18, 1923. Rajendra Prasad referred to the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha at a meeting at Gaya on July 19. I quote from a *Searchlight* report of his speech : "People all over the country had celebrated the Flag Day in a befitting manner and shown their full sympathy with Nagpur in its struggle for the defence of the nation's honour. He said that the tri-coloured flag was not simply a piece of coloured rag but something great as the idea underlying it was transcendental. It represented the honour and the self-respect of a nation. No living and self-respecting nation could brook the least insult to its national flag. Every nation lived and died for its national flag. In wars the first thing that a conquering army did, when it entered the conquered zone, was to unfurl its flag over the place. What was the meaning of that? In European countries the love of the national flag was a passion with the people, young or old. They knew how the Englishmen loved their Union Jack. While ascending the Himalayas they availed themselves of every opportunity of hoisting their national flag on the highest peak of the highest mountain in the world. The Englishmen went and unfurled their flag even in distant North and South Poles where very few people could reach. Why did they do all that? Because they thought that by holding aloft their national flag at all places they would be adding to the glory of their nation. Indians should likewise have their own national flag and should zealously protect the honour of the flag at all costs"[80].

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[29] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 200

Maulana Azad Sobhani was also present at this meeting and Rajendra Prasad further asked the people to join the celebration of Turkish victory in World War I. The following letter was addressed by Rajendra Prasad as General Secretary of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee to all the District Congress Committees in the Province regarding the Turkish peace celebrations: "A letter has been received from the President and the Hony. Secretaries of the Central Khilafat Committee, Bombay, suggesting that the Turkish Peace Treaty, which is expected to be signed today (July 17) should be celebrated by the Hindus and Mussalmans jointly all over the country on the forthcoming *Bakr-Id* (July 25) day. A joint procession with national flags should be taken out after *Id* prayers in the afternoon and mass meetings should be held. Resolutions should be passed (1) congratulating the Khilafat and Ghazi Mustafa Kamal Pasha, (2) reiterating our demands regarding the complete independence of Jazirat-ul-Arab, *viz.*, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Syria; and (3) reiterating the determination of the Hindus and Mussalmans to remain united for the common goal of achieving Swaraj. At night illuminations should take place and collections should be started during the three days of *Bakr-Id* for the Khilafat Fund."

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[80] *The Searchlight*, July 22, 1923

At this time, some having implicit faith in Gandhian ideology started a special organisation called the Gandhi Seva Sangh to push forward constructive work uninfluenced by political controversies. Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel and Gangadhar Rao Deshpande became members of its executive, and Rajendra Prasad remained a member of it as long as it existed.

The 'Council Entry' question caused a schism in the Congress. On January 1, 1923 the pro-Council group formed the Swarajya Party with Deshbandhu C. R. Das as President and Motilal Nehru as Secretary. Other prominent members were Hakim Ajmal Khan, Vithalbhai Patel, N. C. Kelkar, Satyamurti and Jayakar. Many Congressmen were not happy at the split in the organisation and desired some sort of compromise between the two groups. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who had been released from jail and had been nominated to the Congress Working Committee at the Gaya session, made earnest efforts for a compromise, and to be able to work effectively for it he dissociated himself from the Working Committee. At the meeting of the Congress Working Committee and the All-India Congress Committee held at Allahabad, a compromise resolution was adopted. It provided a sort of truce till April 30, before which date 'Council Entry' propaganda was to be suspended on both sides and each of the groups was free "to carry on with the remaining items of its programme without prejudice to the other". In pursuance of this resolution, Rajendra Prasad toured the different provinces along with Rajagopalachari to do propaganda for constructive work and to collect funds for the Satyagraha. In the meetings which were organised during such tours Rajagopalachari delivered most of the speeches in English and Rajendra Prasad interpreted them in Hindi.

After his release from prison, Jawaharlal Nehru also advocated such a move for a compromise between the two groups. At a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee held at Bombay on May 25, 1923, a resolution that nothing should be said or done against the move to participate in the elections to the Councils was passed. At this, some prominent members of the Congress Working Committee including Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachari tendered their resignations and a new Working Committee was constituted with Dr. M. A. Ansari as President and Jawaharlal Nehru as General Secretary. To prevent growth of bitterness between the two groups and to settle the question of Council Entry once for all, a special session of the Congress was convened at Nagpur in the last week of June. A resolution on disciplinary action moved by the Working Committee against the Congress Committees, which had been opposed to the Bombay resolution of the All-India Congress Committee, particularly directed against Rajagopalachari, was defeated by 65 against 63 votes. So, the Working Committee resigned and a new Working Committee composed of those who had resigned earlier was formed. At this Nagpur meeting of the All-India Congress Committee, Rajendra Prasad spoke in English, in defence of Rajagopalachari. He spoke for the first time in English at a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee to make himself "fully understood", as he says, "by the non-Hindi-knowing people from the South."[31] Speaking on the resolution, he said, "I have been since the beginning against the Bombay resolution. It is said we disobeyed the Bombay resolution but who taught us that lesson ? It was the A.I.C.C. which did it by flouting the Gaya resolution. The Working Committee itself referred the matter to the Special Congress. You hold your hands now. Let the Special Congress decide. Look at the resolution dispassionately. It is no use drawing a red herring across the path of the majority party. All that the C.C.Cs.' have done is to record their opinion of standing by the Congress according to their idea. The resolution is premature. By passing this resolution you will be giving additional reasons for greater animosities and rancour. The Committees acted within their right. Even if a police man enters my house with an illegal warrant, I have every right to drive him out. Whatever the Provincial Congress Committees have done, they have done at their risk."[32] At this meeting Rajendra Prasad was elected one of the three Secretaries.

To decide the issue of Council Entry a special session of the All-India Congress met at Delhi on September 15, 1923, with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad as its President. Dominated by the personality of Muhammad Ali who had been released from jail on August 29, it passed the following resolution on the question : "While reaffirming its adherence to the principle of non-violent non-cooperation, this Congress declares that such Congressmen as have no religious or other conscientious objections against entering the legislatures are at liberty to stand as candidates and to exercise their right of voting at the forthcoming elections; and this Congress, therefore, suspends all propaganda against entering the Councils." At the same time, this Congress called upon all Congressmen "to redouble their efforts to carry out the constructive programme" and resolved to form a committee consisting of Rajendra Prasad and some other leaders "to organise an effective campaign of Civil Disobedience."

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[31] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 198

[32] *The Searchlight*, July 20, 1920

From Delhi, Rajendra Prasad went to Solan to see Lala Lajpat Rai who was convalescing there after his illness in prison. On his way back he got down at Lucknow to get himself examined by the Principal of the Lucknow Medical College, Lieut. Col. Sprawson, a specialist in chest diseases. He diagnosed his disease as asthma.

Congress candidates belonging to both the No-change and Swarajya groups fought the Municipal elections in October 1923. Rajendra Prasad's tour in Arrah in this connection added to the enthusiasm of the local Congress workers. In an article entitled 'Patna on Trial', published in *The Searchlight* of October 3, 1923, he made the following observations : "Municipal elections are taking place in various towns of Bihar. The Congress Committee has set up candidates in several of them for election. Congressmen have no other object than that of service, and they only seek an opportunity for service. They will devote their time and energy to the improvement of Municipalities as also to advancing the cause of Swarajya through them. Let us hope that rate-payers will rise above petty personal considerations, and vote for the Congress candidates who stand for all that the Congress stands for. It is a matter of congratulation that the Congress Committee is fighting a clean fight in the biggest of the Municipalities of the Province, and if for nothing else, for the education which is being given to the voters of Patna, the elections are worth contesting. But the support which the Congress is being given, particularly by the masses of this big city, is beyond all praise. Let all classes combine to ensure the return of the Congress candidates and let it not be said that Patna was found wanting. The voting in Patna takes place on Thursday the 4th October. Let all voters attend and cast their vote for Congress nominees."

The Congress candidates attained a fair measure of success at all centres in Bihar. At Patna, Rajendra Prasad got the largest number of votes and was elected Chairman of its Municipality. Anugraha Narayan Sinha was elected Vice-Chairman. As the latter was soon elected Chairman of the Gaya District Board he resigned the Vice-Chairmanship of the Patna Municipality making room for Syed Muhammad who was not a Congressman but "gave a good account of himself".

Improvement of municipal administration by the Congress members proved to be a difficult task and they could not do much in providing civic amenities to the people due to meagre financial resources and rising expenditure. Rajendra Prasad's efforts to raise new taxes to improve municipal finances, for which he consulted Sir Ganesh Dutt Singh, the Minister in charge of Local Self-Government, did not bear fruit. For supervision work; Rajendra Prasad moved from one part of the city to the other by *ekka* (hackney carriage) as he did not get any conveyance allowance. "Graft and bribery were rampant in the Municipality" and these could not be eradicated due to the opposition of interested persons. The only improvement was the installation of a power-house. "We were, therefore, convinced", notes Rajendra Prasad with regret, "that our intention to provide better municipal services was bound to remain a pious wish. Finding ourselves in a helpless position, we tendered our resignations after about a year's experiment".[33] All was not well with the Congressmen also. Except in the Monghyr District Board, there were "rivalries and jealousies" among them. Highly distressed at this, Rajendra Prasad expressed his feeling in an article which he contributed to the *Modern Review* under a pen-name.

While the newly-elected Municipalities and District Boards were functioning, the Bihar Government introduced a Bill in the Legislature by which the Government Auditor was to be authorised to say that any expenditure incurred by an office-bearer of a Municipality or a District Board was illegal and the officer was to refund it. The Auditor could also "deal with matters involving questions of law". Many in Bihar thought that the real object of the Bill was to counteract the advantages of having an elected Chairman. To consider this Bill and some other matters, a conference of the representatives of the Municipalities and the District Boards was convened at Patna on November 30, 1924. As Mazharul Haque, who was to have presided over it fell ill, Rajendra Prasad took the Chair. All present at the conference condemned the Audit Bill. Several other matters relating to Local Self Government were also considered.[34]

The thirty-eighth annual session of the Indian National Congress met at Cocanada from December 28 to 31, 1923, with Muhammad Ali as President. The resolution on Council Entry, passed at the Delhi session, was practically reaffirmed by it. While the Swarajists were permitted to enter the Councils, the "principle and policy" of the "triple boycott" remained unaltered and the Congress appealed to the nation to "carry out the programme of constructive work as adopted at Bardoli and prepare for the adoption of Civil Disobedience". A resolution was passed for establishing an All-India Khadi Board. Rajendra Prasad could not attend this session of the Congress owing to his illness, nor could he preside over the Rashtra Bhasha Prachar Conference. His presidential speech for the Conference was read out by Seth Jamnalal Bajaj who deputised for him.

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[33] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, pp. 210-211

[34] *The Searchlight*, December 3, 1924

From the beginning of the year 1924, members of the Swarajya Party were trying to consolidate their position in the Legislative Assembly and the Provincial Legislatures. But the serious illness of Gandhiji in the Sassoon Hospital at Poona had become a matter of great anxiety for the whole country. Rajendra Prasad was then engaged on the old Burma case in the Patna High Court. On hearing of Gandhiji's illness, he hastened to Poona with a few days' leave and returned to Patna after Gandhiji was out of danger. The Congress President, Muhammad Ali, asked all Congress Committees to hold meetings and pray for Gandhiji's quick recovery.

An attempt to hold such a meeting at Bettiah in the Champaran district led to a very ugly incident due to a malicious move on the part of Rutherford, Manager of the Bettiah Estate, which had been under the Court of Wards. In the Municipal elections of 1923 for chairmanship and vice-chairmanship, two Congressmen, Bepin Behari Varma and Prajapati Mishra, defeated Rutherford. When on January 13, 1924, Prajapati Mishra and another local Congress worker, Jainarain Lal, proceeded to the Meena Bazar of Bettiah to organise a prayer meeting for Gandhiji's recovery, an orderly of the Manager of the Bettiah Raj not only turned them out of the market but also slapped Jainarain Lal. Highly infuriated at this, the shopkeepers of the bazar in a body attended the prayer meeting in the evening. They further resolved to leave Meena Bazar and restarted their business at a new site leased to them by the Municipality. This affected the revenue of the Bettiah Raj and their officers thought of retaliation. On the evening of February 8, when Prajapati Mishra was returning from a library near Meena Bazar in an *ekka,* one Jodha Singh, probably at the instigation of the Manager of the Bettiah Raj, struck a lathi blow on his head, which made him almost unconscious. Further aggrieved at this, the few shopkeepers who had continued to stay at the Meena Bazar also shifted to the site of the new market. Prajapati Mishra appeased the wounded sentiments of the local people and at his instance no further step was taken in this matter.

On receiving a telegram, Rajendra Prasad went to Bettiah and after returning to Patna issued a statement to the Press about this incident. A few days later, a meeting of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee was held at Bettiah where Mazharul Haque and some other leaders were present. It was decided that if the situation at Bettiah did not improve, the Provincial Congress Committee would be compelled to direct the ryots of the Bettiah Estate to stop payment of rent to it.

On February 5, 1924, Gandhiji was discharged from the hospital at Poona and on this very day a meeting was held at Patna to celebrate the release of the great national leader, "whose incarceration", observed *The Searchlight* on February 8, "was an outrage against humanity". Rajendra Prasad was one of the prominent speakers at this meeting.

Because of the appearance of some discordant factors, Gandhiji decided to withdraw gradually from active politics and to concentrate on constructive activities, particularly hand-spinning and hand-weaving. But he did not want to do anything which would go against the Swarajists and asked them not to retire from the Councils, at that stage. So, the Congress took a leading part in the next elections and had greater success than before. But the canker of communalism had already begun to gnaw at our national solidarity and communal riots broke out in various parts of the country. There were communal disturbances in Bihar in September-October 1924, the most serious one being at Bhagalpur. Rajendra Prasad proceeded there with some of his friends to ease the situation. But the crisis was deepening, and very much pained at this, Gandhiji began a fast for 21 days.

At this time the Bengal Government was following a policy of ruthless repression against the Swarajists. It promulgated an ordinance on October 24, 1924, to deal with what it apprehended to be recrudescence of terrorism. Subhas Chandra Bose and many other prominent national leaders were arrested. This high handedness caused great indignation in different parts of the country and protest meetings were held at several places. At a meeting convened in the Anjuman Islamia Hall at Patna on October 31, 1924, under the Presidentship of Khan Bahadur Sarfaraz Hussain Khan and attended by men of different political views, Rajendra Prasad delivered a long speech[35] strongly denouncing the Bengal Government and moved a resolution condemning the promulgation of a special ordinance arming the police and the executive with wide powers for restraining the liberty of the people, and assured Deshbandhu C. R. Das of the readiness of the people to stand by Bengal in her trials and sufferings. One immediate and good effect of this highly repressive policy of the Bengal Government was a compromise agreement called the Calcutta Pact, which was published on November 6, 1924 over the signatures of Gandhiji, C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru.

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[35] *The Searchlight*, November, 1924

The compromise settlement was endorsed at the Belgaum session of the Congress which met on December 26, 1924, with Mahatma Gandhi as President. "We are face to face with a situation", he observed, "that compels us to cry halt... As a Congressman wishing to keep the Congress intact, I advise suspension of Non-Cooperation, for I see that the nation is not ready for it. But as an individual, I cannot, will not do so, as long as the Government remains what it is. It is not merely a policy with me, it is an article of faith."

CHAPTER V

CONSTRUCTIVE ACTIVITIES

THE year 1923-24 marked the beginning of a critical period in the history of Indian nationalism due to the increase in communal tension and widening of cleavage among the different parties and sectional groups. But in spite of these unfortunate developments, Gandhiji's faith in Satyagraha remained unshaken and he tried his utmost to unite the two wings of the Congress. The Swarajya Party and the country as a whole suffered a serious loss in the death of Deshbandhu C. R. Das at Darjeeling on June 16, 1925. Pandit Motilal Nehru now piloted the Swarajya Party with much tact and it was invested by the entire machinery of the Congress with authority to deal with the political affairs of the country at a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee held at Patna on September 22, 1925. It was now at Patna that the All-India Spinners' Association was started "as an integral part of the Congress organization but with an independent existence and powers." The liabilities, assets and investments of the All-India Khadi Board were transferred to the All-India Spinners' Association with the consent of the Swarajists. Gandhiji drew up a constitution for it and became its Chairman. Rajendra Prasad was made one of its life trustees and member of its executive. There was to be an Agent as also a Secretary for each Province. Rajendra Prasad was the Agent for Bihar, Jawaharlal Nehru for U.P., Satish Chandra Das Gupta for Bengal and Rajagopalachari for Tamil Nad. Lakshmi Narayan became the Secretary of the Bihar Branch of the All-India Spinners'

Association. Under Rajendra Prasad's guidance Khadi work was reorganised there on new lines. It progressed both qualitatively and quantitatively and prices of Khadi were low. Owing to the greater importance of north Bihar for Khadi production, the office and chief depot of the Bihar Branch of the All-India Spinners' Association was shifted from Patna to Muzaffarpur and later to Madhubani where it constructed its own buildings.

Gandhiji and his devoted followers including Rajendra Prasad had already been engaged in pushing ahead the programme of constructive work particularly the spread of Khadi and national education, almost from the beginning of the year 1924. In recognition of his valuable services in regard to Swadeshi, Rajendra Prasad was given the honour of inaugurating the All-India Swadeshi Exhibition at the Belgaum Congress on December 23, 1924. On this occasion, he delivered a very interesting speech[1] in Hindi. He said :

"It is a well-known fact that whenever a country or a nation falls on evil days, its decay is not confined to any one department of life but pervades its whole being and signs of a falling off are visible in everything that its culture connotes, and if this process lasts for any length of time many things which are involved in its own culture are forgotten and it begins to live on the imitation and mimicry of other nations and countries which are strong enough to impose their own culture and civilisation on it. The modern history of India shows how she had been conquered by the British and how this conquest has been becoming more and more complete. The flow of this current is now stopped and we are trying to find means to revive our past glory. A proof of this national reawakening is furnished by an exhibition like this, which I hope to open to-day. You will see in it specimens of the art of this ancient land. I do not know anything about art and so say nothing about it. But there is one thing which we were going to forget but which is as necessary for our national life as the air or the food is for individual life and that is *Khaddar*. About *Khaddar* also Mahatmaji and other individuals like my old teacher, Sir P. C. Ray, have said and written a great deal and whatever I may say will only be a repetition.

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[1] *The Searchlight*, December 31, 1924

"But I think I may tell you something about my own Province which you may not possibly know and which will show the possibility of *Khaddar*. At one time I calculated on the basis of the population of my Province that it would be possible and with some effort it would be easy enough for the people of our Province to supply enough hand-woven cloth made of hand-spun yarn for the whole population. Leaving out Orissa and confining myself to Hindi-speaking Bihar only, our population is about three crores. The average quantity of cloth per head used by our people is about eleven yards. We would, therefore, require about 33 crore yards of cloth for my Province. If you take to handloom work for only 300 days in the year leaving 65 days for festivals, ceremonies, illness, etc., we require 11 lakh yards of yarn to be woven every day in the year to get 33 crores of yards of cloth and if one loom could weave 5½ yards per day we would require about two lakhs of such looms to give us 33 crore yards of cloth. But it is a known fact that an experienced weaver can weave much more than 5½ yards in a day, and if I take an average of 8 yards per day it would not be, I think, too much. Therefore, we will require 1,36,250 looms to weave at the rate of eight yards per head per day. I found later on that the Government took a census of the handlooms working in my Province and the Government report is that more than 68,000 looms are working there. There are thousands of weavers who, having given up their profession, are working in Calcutta and other places in jute mills or have taken to other professions altogether. If these people could be assured of a settled income, they would gladly return to their ancestral profession of weaving. It will not be necessary for them to learn the art because they know it and have not yet forgotten it. It will not be very difficult for them to set up the looms because in most houses the looms or at any rate parts thereof are still kept hanging from the roofs. It is thus clear that if we wanted to have a complete boycott of mill-made cloth, whether foreign or country-made, we have even now enough weavers in my Province and we can easily have the necessary looms set up. But if we want to exclude only foreign cloth, it is possible to do that even with looms which are already working with some addition. I think that what is true of my Province is true of other Provinces also and of the whole country and if a census were taken of the working looms, of all such looms as may easily be set up, there will be no difficulty so far as weaving is concerned. The earnings of the weavers are also not small. They can earn Rs. 15 to 20 per month and I know from personal experience that weavers who have not given up their looms are quite happy.

But it is said that spinning is not paying, and that the wages of spinners are so small that no one would consider it worth his or her while to spin. If the wages are enhanced the cloth will become so dear that no one would agree to purchase it. We have to consider this from two points of view. The first is : Are there enough spinners in this country so that they can supply all the yarn that may be necessary and secondly, are their wages such as to make it worth their while to spin without making the cloth very dear ? I will again take my own Province. We require nearly three pounds of yarn for about eight yards of cloth and if the yarn is fine we shall require less. But I will take the coarser kind of yarn because the spinners mostly spin coarser counts and also because the coarser cloth is dearer. If we assume that a spinner can spin 320 yards of yarn of 10 counts in an hour he can spin in six hours about 10 tolas and to make up three pounds of yarn we require about 12 Charkhas working for six hours a day. We thus require about 12 Charkhas to feed one loom. Reducing the number of hours to a certain extent and also assuming that the spinner spins less than 320 yards in an hour, it may rightly be said that 20 Charkhas can easily feed one loom. I may add, however, that experiments have shown that a speed of six or seven hundred yards per hour has been reached by our spinners and the fineness has reached much over 300 counts. So I think the average I have taken will not be considered very high. We would, therefore, require about 27 or 28 lakhs of *Charkhas* to supply us sufficient yarn to clothe all our people. Now 27 lakhs out of a population of three crores is not large. Therefore, there is no difficulty so far as mere numbers are concerned and it will be remembered that we require 27 lakhs of *Charkhas* for effecting a complete boycott of all kinds of mill cloth, whether foreign or Indian. If we leave out of account for the present the Indian mill cloth, the work becomes very much easier."

Regarding the question whether the wages of the spinners were enough, Rajendra Prasad observed from his personal experience of the Province of Bihar that there were many women who had never given up spinning and who were earning a living with the help of *Charkha* alone, and also that many families purchased their salt, grains, vegetables, oil, clothing, etc., with the income of their women from spinning. He further noted that if one could earn Rs. 4 a month by spinning he did not "earn a negligible amount considering that the average income of our people" did not "exceed two rupees four annas a month". He emphasised that if people devoted themselves to proper organisation and propaganda for *Charkha* and *Khaddar,* it would not be "impossible to effect a complete boycott of foreign cloth" in Bihar and also in the country as a whole.

Under Rajendra Prasad's guidance, a Khadi Exhibition was organised at Patna on December 13 and 14, 1924. It was a non-political function and was attended by Judges of the High Court including the Chief Justice, the Hon'ble Sir Dawson Miller, and high officers of the Government, most of whom purchased Khadi. Lady Miller gave away the prizes to the prize-winners in a spinning competition held on the occasion. Rajendra Prasad and some others tried this year to revive the Bihari Students' Conference on its old model. At a preliminary meeting held at Patna in this connection in April 1924, Rajendra Prasad delivered an inspiring speech[2] appealing to the people to push on constructive activities with greater zeal and sense of dedication. It was also at his invitation that in this year an eminent savant and scientist, Sir J. C. Bose, one of his old teachers at the Presidency College, Calcutta, who still remembered him with affection, and who had then come to deliver the Convocation Address of the Patna University, made a highly instructive speech at the Bihar Vidyapith.

The Bihar Provincial Hindu Conference was held at Muzaffarpur on April 4, 1925. Rajendra Prasad proposed Lala Lajpat Rai to the chair and this motion was seconded by Ram Dayalu Singh. Lala Lajpat Rai delivered his Presidential Address extempore in Hindi. In conclusion he congratulated Bihar on having a personality like Rajendra

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[2] *The Searchlight*, April 11, 1924

Prasad and wished that every district in the other Provinces should produce a Rajendra Prasad.[3]

An important event of this year, with which Rajendra Prasad was associated, was the appointment of the Bodh Gaya Temple Enquiry Committee consisting of himself, the famous indologist and historian, Dr. K. P. Jayaswal, Braj Kishore Prasad and Damodar Das, who later on became Bhikshu Rahul Sankrityayana and distinguished himself as a great scholar. This Committee was formed under instructions from both the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha. The report of this Committee was placed before the All-India Congress Committee which accepted it. But for certain reasons no definite steps were taken to implement its recommendations though Rajendra Prasad tried hard for it.

To promote constructive activities, Gandhiji moved among the masses in the rural areas. "I travel", he said, "because I fancy that the masses want to meet me. I certainly want to meet them. I deliver my simple message to them in a few words and they and I are satisfied. It penetrates the mass mind slowly but surely"[4]. He undertook extensive and strenuous tours in Bihar in 1925 and 1927 and Rajendra Prasad accompanied him to different places. During his tour in 1927 he spent a quiet day at Zeradei, which he considered to be "a place of pilgrimage" as the birth-place of Rajendra Prasad[5].

Gandhiji's Bihar tours gave considerable impetus to the production of Khadi. To popularise it further, more exhibitions were held at different places in Bihar in 1926 and 1927 under the guidance of Rajendra Prasad. The first one was inaugurated on the grounds of the Bihar Vidyapith by Satish Chandra Das Gupta of the Khadi Pratisthan, Calcutta. The second one was opened in the Bihar Young Men's Institute, Patna, by Sadhu Vaswani of Sind. The third one was organised at Arrah, the fourth one at Muzaffarpur (opened by Maulavi Muhammad Shafi) and the fifth one at Chapra (opened by Mazharul Haque), the sixth one at Mairwa, a small village in the district of Chapra, the seventh one at Gaya (June 11, 1926) and the eighth one at Giridih on August 16, 1926, opened by Rajendra Prasad. "Congressmen, non-Congressmen, Government officials, zamindars, lawyers, big and small merchants and in some cases even Europeans"[6] visited these exhibitions. Khadi exhibitions were opened at several other places, such as Motihari, Jamshedpur, Laheriasarai (opened by Rajendra Prasad), Deoghar, Hazaribagh and Ranchi. On the last day of his Bihar trip in 1927, Gandhiji met the Khadi workers of Bihar and a special Khadi exhibition was organised on the occasion by Rajendra Prasad in the Sinha Institute at Patna. There was a tremendous rush at the function on the opening day. So, the Ministers, high Government officials, and some barristers whom Rajendra Prasad had invited to the exhibition, visited it the next day and Rs. 2,000 worth of *Khaddar* was sold in a day.[7]

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[3] *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, April 8, 1925

[4] Mahadev Desai, *Gandhiji in Indian Villages*, p. 232

[5] *Young India*, 1927-28, p. 53

Rajendra Prasad's activities for promotion of Khadi were not confined to Bihar only. These were extended to other places when he visited them. On hearing that Gandhiji was suffering from high blood pressure and had gone to the Nandi Hills in Mysore State for rest, Rajendra Prasad went there and stayed with him for a few days. Later, he accompanied Gandhiji to Bangalore where a Khadi exhibi-

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6. *Young India*, July 1, 1926
Young India, 1927-28, p. 80

tion had been organised and in which the Tamil Nad and the Andhra branches participated. He went to Tiruppur, where the chief depot of the Tamil Nad Charkha Sangh was located, and then to Thiruchengode in Salem District, the site of an Ashram started by Rajagopalachari, where good work was being done in regard to Khadi. He studied Khadi production and organisational methods at these centres and tried to introduce them in Bihar. He visited several Khadi centres in Andhra at the request of Sita Ram Shastri, Secretary of the Andhra Charkha Sangh, and delivered speeches relating to the utility and economics of Khadi. Realising the importance of these speeches, Congressmen in Andhra requested him to publish them in book form. These were published in English under the title, Economics of Khadi, and a Hindi translation of it came out later.

Besides his efforts for the spread of Khadi, Rajendra Prasad was very much engaged during this period in collecting funds for the Bihar Vidyapith, the condition of which was deteriorating due to lack of finance and the growing indifference of the people to the type of education imparted by it. In spite of such odds, a college with 32 students, and nine high schools, 15 middle schools and 30 primary schools were affiliated to the Bihar Vidyapith in 1926. But the number of such schools and also their students began to decline thereafter. Rajendra Prasad and some others working with him sought to remove the financial stringency of the Vidyapith by raising subscriptions from the local people. But this did not produce good results and money had to be collected from different places. A gentleman, named Bhagwan Das, donated a plot of land which yielded some income and Gajadhar Prasad Sahu of Muzaffarpur made a gift for it out of his own Trust. To make the Bihar Vidyapith attractive to students, some eminent scholars from outside Bihar were invited to join its staff.

But, for various reasons, the institution could not be revitalised despite the best efforts of Rajendra Prasad and his co-workers.

As regards elections to the Legislatures, Rajendra Prasad retained his conviction as a no-changer. Still, keeping in view the decision of the Congress for fighting elections, he rendered all possible assistance to it. In the elections of 1926 in Bihar, the general result was return of the Congress candidates to both the Central Assembly and the Provincial Council in good numbers. To the Council of State, out of the four candidates nominated by the Congress in Bihar, three were elected.

But party dissensions and cleavages gradually widened; and some new parties were formed, *viz.*, the Justice Party of Madras, the Punjab National Unionist Party and the Independent Party. In the Swarajya Party itself, differences arose on certain fundamental matters. In 1923, Pandit Motilal Nehru, who had accepted membership of the Indian Sandhurst Committee, and Vithalbhai Patel, another prominent Swarajist, who was elected the first non-official President of the Assembly on August 22, 1925, guided a group which insisted on obstruction from within the legislatures. Another group, called the Responsive Co-operation Party, led by the Maharashtra leader, N. C. Kelkar, advocated acceptance of offices. A Swarajist leader, Tambe, who was President of the C. P. Legislative Assembly, accepted membership of the Governor-General's Executive Council without resigning from his party. Pandit Motilal Nehru disapproved of it, but it was supported by Kelkar, Jayakar and Dr. Moonje.

Differences of opinion among the leaders of the Swarajya Party were considered at the fortieth annual session of the Congress held at Kanpur from December 26 to 28, 1925, with Sarojini Naidu as its President.

The main resolution on the future political programme, moved by Pandit Motilal Nehru and ultimately accepted by the Congress, provided that the British Government should frame another constitution for India following the demand for full responsible government made in the Legislative Assembly on February 8, 1924, and that if they did not take any satisfactory steps in this direction before February 1926, the Swarajists would go out of the Legislatures and follow a programme of constructive work.

Rajendra Prasad and his brother attended the Kanpur session of the Congress with their families. It was here that Rajendra Prasad met Miraben for the first time and was very much impressed by her faith and devotion.[8]

Rajendra Prasad did not believe in the efficacy of Council Entry. But considering that his "personal views had to be submerged before party considerations', he devoted his "energies and time to working in the Congress election campaign"[9] by undertaking extensive tours which affected his health. He regretted that various caste groups among the Hindus were guided by mutual jealousies and tried to outmanoeuvre one another. He expressed his views about it in an article in the *Desh*.

Rajendra Prasad visited Assam, at the invitation of the local people, to help them in organising the Khadi industry. He found Assam "almost an ideal Province for the propagation of Khadi" and on his return from the Assam tour persuaded the Secretary of the All-India Spinners' Association to provide some financial assistance to that Province for Khadi work.

Tension between the Hindus and the Muslims had increased and communal riots broke out at several places. There were minor clashes in Bihar also. Deeply mortified at this, Mazharul Haque organised on June 10, 1926, a conference of the leading Congressmen of Bihar, some members of the Khilafat Committee and several others not belonging to those organisations. They decided to take proper steps to restrain the pernicious effects of communal frenzy. Some of them including Rajendra Prasad toured the Province for this. This produced some soothing effect, but excitement did not completely disappear. The assassination of Swami Shraddhanand by a Muslim fanatic on December 23, 1926 aggravated it. The canker of communalism, eating into the vitals of our national solidarity, presented a grave problem before the country. The Indian National Congress meeting at Gauhati in Assam on December 26, 1926, with S. Srinivasa Iyengar as President, deplored the tragic death of Swami Shraddhanand and passed a resolution for removing the growing differences between the Hindus and the Mussalmans. Resolutions for restoring cordiality between the two communities were passed also at the Unity Conference held in Calcutta in October 1927, and at the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee held in Calcutta at the same time.

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[8] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 246

[9] *Ibid.*

Rajendra Prasad attended the next annual session of the Congress at Madras in December 1927, with Dr. Ansari as President. The question of boycotting the Indian Statutory Commission loomed large and the Congress resolved that "the only self-respecting course for India is to boycott the Commission at every stage and in every form." The Congress also authorised the Working Committee to draft a Swaraj Constitution for India in collaboration with the other organisations in the country. Through the influence of Jawaharlal Nehru, who had just returned from a tour of Europe, a resolution in favour of complete independence was moved at this session. Rajendra Prasad opposed it because he thought "that we should not adopt anything for the implementation of which we were not prepared." The Congress, however, voted for it, though it remained a mere resolution till the Lahore session of the Congress was held two years later.

In his Madras journey this time Rajendra Prasad had in his company his wife, his brother's wife and other members of his family. After the Congress session was over, they visited Madurai, Rameshwaram and other holy centres of pilgrimage in the South. Leaving his family at Rameshwaram, Rajendra Prasad went with some friends to Ceylon to see Damodar Das, who later on became famous as Bhikshu Rahul Sankrityayana. Here he saw with deep admiration the ancient caves with beautiful mural paintings and the famous stupa at Anuradhapura. On his way back to Bihar he went on another tour of the places of pilgrimage in the South.

Early in 1928, Rajendra Prasad applied to the Government for a passport to be able to undertake a journey to England in connection with an appeal filed by the Maharaja of Dumraon in the Burma case of Hari Prasad Sinha as he was committed to see it through. The Police Department in Bihar was not in favour of granting him such a passport. But the Chief Secretary, H. K. Briscoe, did not agree with this view. "We have nothing on record against him", he noted, "except that he is a professional politician of the N.C.O. type but possibly rather of a better personal character than many. It would seem difficult to refuse him a passport when Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru have been allowed to roam freely over Europe." For this journey Rajendra Prasad used Kashmiri woollen garments prepared in the Indian style as he did not want to use Western type of clothes and during his stay in England he managed without any change in his way of living in which he was helped by his attendant, Gobardhan, who had accompanied him. On the way he visited Cairo. In London, he worked with Hari Prasad Sinha's first Counsel, Upjohn, who, though over seventy-five, worked hard and impressed Rajendra Prasad very much by his "integrity and efficient work." The two parties in the case made a compromise.

Two days after this, Rajendra Prasad left London and proceeded to Santasburg near Vienna to attend a No-War Conference which was being held there under the presidentship of Fenner Brockway, the famous British Labour leader. Delegates from Germany, Austria, France, England, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Palestine and some other countries also attended this Conference. Knowing Rajendra Prasad to be a follower of Gandhiji, they all evinced special interest in him. At their request he addressed the Conference and confined his speech to the Champaran Satyagraha pointing out how Gandhiji's method of non-violence had been successfully used there. The Conference lasted three days and passed an anti-war resolution for which the delegates were to do propaganda.

From Santasburg, Rajendra Prasad went to Gratz to deliver a letter from Gandhiji to a doctor named Standenath, and his wife. The couple used to exchange letters with Gandhiji. Rajendra Prasad was accompanied to Gratz by Runham Brown, an Englishman and Secretary of the Conference, and some other delegates, all of whom were to carry on anti-war propaganda there. Reaching Gratz on August 1, 1928, Rajendra Prasad was escorted by Dr. Standenath and his wife to their residence and then they proceeded to attend a meeting to be held at a nearby place at 7 P.M. But persons opposed to anti-war propaganda used violence to prevent holding of the meeting and caused injuries to Rajendra Prasad and his hosts who returned to their place bleeding profusely. With proper medical aid and care Rajendra Prasad was cured soon. Dr. Standenath wrote about this unfortunate incident to Gandhiji, who published a full account of it in the *Young India.* The news of the assault on Rajendra Prasad caused much concern and anxiety throughout Bihar and the people here were soon relieved on hearing of his recovery.[10] Referring to the kind treatment of the hosts of Rajendra Prasad, Mahatma Gandhi observed: "These friends deserve warmest thanks of the relatives and the numerous friends of Rajendra Babu for their bravely defending his person at peril to their own lives. The incident shows the essential identity of human nature and it shows that gentleness, self-sacrifice and generosity are the exclusive possession of no one race or religion."

With a bandage on his head, Rajendra Prasad left for Vienna the next day and from there he proceeded to Switzerland to see Romain Rolland. As Romain Rolland was then staying at the Cartigi Hills to avoid heat, Rajendra Prasad met him there. He also visited Burnville, Newchattel, Lausanne and Geneva. While moving along a bazar in Newchattel, he noticed a piece of hand-spun cloth in a shop. There he met an English-knowing shop-assistant who talked to him about Gandhiji, most of whose writings she had read. From Geneva he proceeded to Paris and after two days' stay there went to London, where one of his companions from Bihar, Satranjan Prasad Sinha, died in the hospital from the effect of an injury after being struck down by a car. After the deceased's funeral was over, he went to Edinburgh. Returning from there, he left for the Continent on his way back to India. He attended a Youth Conference at Amsterdam (Holland) which was organised as "an anti-war convention" and was attended by delegates from different countries who took much interest in international affairs. He also addressed the Conference. Here he met another Indian named Dr. Sanyal. Then he started on his tour of Europe which he wanted to finish in a few days in view of the short time at his disposal. From the Berlin Railway Station he was taken by a Thomas Cook man to a hotel where Hari Prasad Sinha had been staying. He remained there with him for three days and moved round the city. He next visited Leipzig for a day. He hoped to meet there Dr. Kuhn whose books he had read and whose system of hip bath he had begun practising in India with good results. But he was disappointed to hear that this great man had passed away. He met his son in the hospital who prescribed a bath and a dietary for him. At Munich he saw the famous Museum and the Beer Cellar where Hitler delivered his orations. He halted for a day in Venice and for the next two days in Rome. On his way to Marseilles, he broke journey at Nice where he met Deep Naraln Singh of Bhagalpur. Reaching Marseilles he embarked on the s.s. *Mooltan* and on board there he met Hari Prasad Sinha and the other colleagues. He had a mild attack of asthma from which he recovered by the time he reached Bombay in the second week of September, 1928.

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[10] *The Searchlight*, August, 22 and 29, 1928

In a meeting, held in the Young Men's Institute at Patna on September 20, 1928, Rajendra Prasad narrated his impressions about foreign travel to an enthusiastic audience consisting mainly of the student community. He said that education of Indian students, particularly in law, in England was rather a costly affair and was not profitable in all respects. He, however, recommended Vienna and Germany as suitable centres for higher studies in medical science and humanities, respectively. He exhorted the youths of our country to imbibe the discipline of Western educational institutions. He also narrated the experiences he had at the World's Youth Conference, and at the War Resisters' Conference in Europe and told the audience that many in those countries were looking forward to India attaining independence and for messages of peace from her.

CHAPTER VI

THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

FROM the year 1928 certain factors generated a new impulse throughout the country and there was a tremendous stir in the minds of the people leading to a formidable challenge to alien domination. The Government's policy of manipulating India's currency to suit its own interests, the measure of its Finance Member, Sir Basil Blackett, stabilising the rupee at 1s. 6d., two pence above the traditional exchange ratio, and its decision on the Skeen Committee's Report containing a plan for complete Indianisation of half of the cadre of the Indian Army in twenty-five years were considered by some to be anti-national measures. The publication in England of Miss Mayo's *'Mother India'* during the summer of 1927 wounded national feelings as it presented an untrue, biased and damaging picture of India's civilisation, calculated to prejudice her case for freedom. The 'no-revenue' campaign conducted in Bardoli by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in 1928 with much tact and courage infused a new spirit of boldness into the minds of the people of Gujarat and presented a stirring example of Satyagraha to the country as a whole.

The announcement by the British Government on November 8. 1927, of the appointment of a Statutory Commission on constitutional reform to be presided over by Sir John Simon without any Indian as a member on it greatly shocked Indian national sentiment and evoked "universal condemnation" from organisations representing different shades of opinion in India "as a negation of the fundamental right of self-determination which is inherent in every nation".[1] The Indian National Congress in its two annual sessions in Madras and Calcutta in December 1927 and December 1928, respectively, strongly condemned this step on the part of the Government. The Commission was boycotted with the cry of "Go back, Simon" by the Congressmen, the Liberals and important sections of the Muslim Community on its arrival at Bombay on February 3, 1928 and during its visits to other parts of India.

Under the guidance of Rajendra Prasad and some other leaders, Bihar too made an enthusiastic response to the determination of the country as a whole to boycott the Simon Commission. In this Province there had already been a wide-spread agitation at the time due to an ill-advised step on the part of the Government in superseding the District Board at Gaya and removing Anugraha Narayan Sinha, a prominent national leader, from its chairmanship. A public meeting was held at Gaya to protest against the high-handedness of the Government and Rajendra Prasad delivered a speech strongly denouncing it. He pointed out that proper enquiries had been made by the Congress into the allegations made against Anugraha Narayan Sinha and these were found to be baseless. Rajendra Prasad and some other Congress leaders addressed meetings at other places in the Gaya district about this matter till January 10, 1929. Rajendra Prasad could not attend the meeting at Nawadah in this district due to an attack of asthama. A meeting of the Bihar Provincial Political Conference was held at Patna on December 9, 1928, with Anugraha Narayan Sinha as President and

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[1] *Annual Report of the Congress for the Year 1927*

Sachchidananda Sinha as Chairman of the Reception Committee. Here also the Government's policy regarding the Gaya District Board was bitterly criticised. Most of those who had come from different districts to attend this Conference joined the demonstration against the Simon Commission when a special train carrying its members reached the platform opposite the Hardinge Park, near the Patna Junction Railway station, on December 12, 1928. In this enthusiasm against the unwanted Commission, about 30,000 people reached there on the chilly morning of December and, holding black flags in their hands, shouted "Go back, Simon". Rajendra Prasad advised the students and others "to avoid conflicts and remain quiet even if the opposite party becomes aggressive." The demonstration was peaceful and was not marked by anything like what had happened in the Punjab and the U.P. where the police had treated leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Jawaharlal Nehru and Govind Ballabh Pant with wanton cruelty and Lala Lajpat Rai succumbed to the injuries inflicted upon him.

Boycott of the Simon Commission was a clear indication of the country's awakening. The people here also proved their constructive statesmanship and formulated a scheme of constitution. A committee for this purpose had been formed with Pandit Motilal Nehru as Chairman at a meeting of the All-Parties Conference held at Bombay on May 19, 1928. In its Report, published in August 1928, the Nehru Committee recommended Dominion Status as the basis of the constitution for India. It was not in favour of separate electorates but recommended joint or mixed electrorates, the only communal safeguard being reservation of seats for the Muslims where they were in a minority. The recommendations of the Nehru Committee were accepted with certain amendments at a meeting of the

All-Parties Conference held at Lucknow on August 28 and 29, 1928. But the Muslim League was opposed to these. In March 1929, M. A. Jinnah formulated his fourteen-point scheme on behalf of the Muslims.

In the Congress circles a section led by Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and Srinivasa Iyengar, who were opposed to the Dominion Status idea and urged complete independence, formed the Independence of India League in November 1928, to help achieve it. But this did not cause any split in the Congress. Under the influence of Gandhiji, who had re-entered the field of politics, the Congress at its Calcutta session, held on December 29, 1928, passed a compromise resolution, which, while "adhering to the resolution relating to complete independence passed at the Madras Congress (1927)", was ready to adopt the constitution recommended by the Nehru Committee if it was accepted "in its entirety" by the British Parliament before December 31, 1929. In the event of its "non-acceptance by that date or its earlier rejection" the Congress was to "organise a campaign of non-cooperation by advising the country to refuse taxation and in such other manner as may be decided upon".

Rajendra Prasad had opposed the resolution about independence at the Madras session of the Congress. Influenced by the views of Gokhale during his contact with him in Calcutta in 1910 about the equal status of all the members of the British Commonwealth and then "equal share in shaping its policy" and as "an admirer of the British Constitution", Rajendra Prasad then felt that Dominion Status could be the "right goal" and that "complete independence would only add to our difficulties".[2]

The Congress at its Calcutta session also emphasised the furtherance of the constructive programme. A Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee was formed in 1929 and the Congress Working Committee resolved that "on Sunday, March 17, and thereafter on the first Sunday of every month special attention should be paid to the propaganda for the boycott of foreign cloth and Khadi should be hawked". Rajendra Prasad was then one of the Secretaries of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, and he sought to facilitate the work regarding boycott of foreign cloth in various ways. He prepared a scheme according to which the workers in each district were to select respective areas and to visit every home. He himself explained the scheme to the workers of the four districts, Saran, Champaran, Darbhanga and Bhagalpur.

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[2] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, pp. 289-290

There were two exciting events in Bihar at that time—one was a strike in the Tata Iron and Steel Works at Jamshedpur from June 1 to September 12, 1928, which ended in a compromise with the intervention of Subhas Chandra Bose, President of the Mazdoor Sangh, and the other was a strike in 1929 among the workers of the Tinplate Company at Golmuri, a suburb of Jamshedpur. Subhas Chandra Bose came here also and at his request Rajendra Prasad visited the area several times to study this matter. Prof. Bari took a leading part in conducting the strike which continued for ten months. Rajendra Prasad pleaded to the Government that, under the Trade Disputes Act, the matter should be placed for adjudication. In this connection, he met the Chief Secretary and a member of the Governor's Executive Council. But despite all his efforts, the Government did not agree to any such settlement.

In pursuance of the programme of constructive activities, Rajendra Prasad addressed a meeting at Barhi in the Monghyr district on April 12, 1929 with an appeal for enlistment of volunteers to be employed in propaganda for boycott of liquor and foreign cloth. The same day Rajendra Prasad presided at a meeting organised at Jagdamba Pustakalaya at Barhya, also in the Monghyr district. On May 13, 1929, he addressed a meeting at Gopalganj in the Saran district where he advised the people "to take lesson from Bardoli", that is, from the successful peasant Satyagraha at Bardoli.

On the release of Jagat Narayan Lal from the Hazaribagh Jail on July 13, 1929, Rajendra Prasad addressed a meeting of the citizens of Patna at Gulabbagh on July 14. He boldly criticised what was then known as the law of sedition. The police advised Government to prosecute him for this. But the Government thought that as it was, "the prosecution now of a man who has won the respect of the Moderate Party and is reputed to be one of the honest men of his own party, it would cause a good deal of unnecessary bitterness". Rajendra Prasad toured the district of Chapra from September 16 to 18. He addressed meetings at different places and urged people to use *Khaddar* and to work for Swaraj.

In November 1929, Rajendra Prasad visited Burma accompanied by his Secretary, Mathura Prasad, at the invitation of Hariji and also in response to a request from the tenants of Kyantaga to settle their dispute with their zamindar, Mylne, who was originally an indigo planter in Shahabad, Bihar. Hariji's zamindari in Burma was called Ziyawadi. Rajendra Prasad was pleased to see many Biharis in Rangoon and one of his old servants met him there. Nageswararao Pantulu of Andhra Pradesh had also come to Burma at that time. Both he and Rajendra Prasad were given a reception by leading Burmans and Indians.

While returning from Burma, Rajendra Prasad had a bad attack of asthma on board the ship. Reaching Calcutta he went to the house of his friend Jogendra Narayan Majumdar, a barrister. He thought of leaving Calcutta for Monghyr where he was to preside over the 28th session of the Bihar Provincial Conference. At the request of his friend, he placed himself under the treatment of a homeopath, which ultimately did him good. The Conference was held on December 9, 1929. On reaching Monghyr, Rajendra Prasad again fell ill and the Hindi translation of his Presidential speech was read out. In his speech he advocated Dominion Status. "My conception of Dominion Status", he said, " was one of partnership on equal terms dissolvable at the will of any of the partners". But the Conference passed a resolution for independence. Rajendra Prasad was then elected President of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel attended the Conference at Monghyr and toured the Province of Bihar which added to the enthusiasm of the people for constructive work and for the impending national struggle.

Events were moving fast in all parts of India, adding momentum to the national movement. Besides the factors mentioned above, the post-1924 period was marked by recrudescence of revolutionary activities, and those who had organised a new revolutionary party, called the Hindustan Socialist Army, were active at various places. On April 8, 1929, two of its leaders, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutta, threw bombs from the visitors' gallery on the floor of the House of the Assembly "to make a noise and create a stir, and not to injure", as they stated later. A large number of other persons were also arrested in connection with what came to be known as the Lahore Conspiracy Case. Along with Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutta, many other accused persons went on hunger strike as a protest against the treatment meted out to the under-trial prisoners. All the strikers, except Jatindra Nath

Das, took food after a prolonged hunger strike. Jatindra Nath Das ultimately died on September 13 which was the 64th day of his hunger strike. This caused intense grief and excitement among the people all over the country. While celebrating the Political Sufferers' Day on August 10, 1929, Rajendra Prasad led a procession at Patna, presided over a meeting held at Gulzarbagh and addressed another meeting in Patna.

The British Government realised the gravity of the situation. These were "critical days", observed the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, when "matters by which men are duly touched" were "at issue". So, after consulting the Labour Cabinet in England of which Ramsay Macdonald was the Prime Minister, and Wedgewood Benn, Secretary of State for India, he made an announcement on October 31, 1929. to the effect that "the natural issue of India's constitutional progress", implicit in the declaration of August 1917, was "the attainment of Dominion Status". He also made a mention of the meeting of a Round Table Conference in England to consider the future constitution of India. But the Viceroy's statement was criticised by a section of the Press and many statesmen in England, and after an interview which Gandhiji and Motilal Nehru had with the Viceroy at New Delhi on December 23, it became clear that Dominion Status was far away. "For us", writes Rajendra Prasad in his autobiography, "it served as a warning that all pronouncements of the British Government should be read and re-read, scanned and analysed in a dispassionate and realistic manner...."

The country was forging ahead and there was an intense fervour all round when the Congress met at Lahore on December 29 to 31, 1929, with Jawaharlal Nehru as President. It passed a momentous resolution for complete independence as the goal of India. Besides appealing to the "nation zealously to prosecute the constructive programme", this Congress authorised the All-India Congress Committee, "whenever it deems fit, to launch upon a programme of Civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes, whether in selected areas or otherwise, and under such safeguards as it may consider necessary". At midnight of December 31, Jawaharlal Nehru unfurled the Tricolour, the flag of Indian Independence, amidst shouts of *'Inqilab Zindabad'*, "Long live Revolution".

Rajendra Prasad could not attend the Lahore session of the Congress due to his illness. He spent about two months in his village home, Zeradei, with his friend Satish Chandra Mukherjee. When the Congress was in session at Lahore, Bihar lost one of its noblest patriots, Mazharul Haque, who passed away in his village of Faridpur in Chapra district. Very much pained on hearing this, Rajendra Prasad went to Faridpur and offered his condolence to the Begam Saheba and other members of the bereaved family.

In its meeting held on January 2, 1930, the Congress Working Committee fixed January 26 to be celebrated as Independence Day when the country was to take the pledge of independence. In Bihar the Provincial Congress Committee issued, on January 20, 1930, a definite programme for celebration of the Independence Day and it was followed with due solemnity on January 26. Rajendra Prasad got several calls to address meetings on that day. But he could not respond to any of these as he was then convalescing in his village home following his illness. He addressed only two meetings in his village and another at Siwan.

The Congress Working Committee passed a resolution at Ahmedabad on February 15, 1930, to launch Civil Disobedience. Meeting at Ahmedabad on March 21, 1930, the All-India Congress Committee authorised Gandhiji and others, who believed in non-violence as an article of faith, to start it as and when they decided to do so. Gandhiji thought of launching Civil Disobedience by breaking salt laws. Salt was an article of prime necessity for all and the salt monopoly affected all. Gandhiji argued : "There is no article like salt, outside water, by taxing which the State can reach the starving millions, the sick, the maimed and the utterly helpless. The tax constitutes, therefore, the most inhuman poll tax the ingenuity of man can devise."

Rajendra Prasad was not hopeful about the success of this plan in Bihar, an inland area where people manufactured salt only at some places as a by-product while preparing saltpetre out of earth. So he sought Gandhiji's permission to start Satyagraha in Bihar by non-payment of the *chaukidari* tax, which everyone had to pay and against which there was much discontent among the people. But Gandhiji did not agree to this. "Let us first break the salt laws", he observed, "and then we shall be able to launch other no-tax campaigns if popular enthusiasm is aroused." Rajendra Prasad then decided to abide by Gandhiji's directive.

Gandhiji's plan was to start Satyagraha on April 6, 1930, by breaking the salt laws at Dandi, a village on the sea-coast, about 322 kilometres from the Sabarmati Ashram. He left his Ashram for Dandi on March 12 with seventy-eight volunteers. Many delegates including Rajendra Prasad, who had gone to attend the Congress meeting at Ahmedabad, proceeded to Jambusar and met Gandhiji. They accompanied him for some distance and then came back. There was a wave of enthusiasm and preparation for Satyagraha in Bihar as in other parts of the country. At the request of Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru toured the Saran, Champaran and Muzaffarpur districts and his speeches greatly inspired the people there. *The Searchlight* of April 9, 1930 observed : "The thrill of a new hope, the surge of a new inspiration, the pursuit of a noble ideal and romance of a new sacrifice surcharge the atmosphere."

Salt Satyagraha' was soon launched in different parts of Bihar, the districts of Champaran and Saran being the first in the field. Rajendra Prasad moved from place to place propagating the message of Satyagraha, for which he issued suitable instructions as President of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee.[2a]

Rajendra Prasad's views as to how the policemen were to be treated is contained in the following extract :

"I hear that in the areas where Satyagraha operations are going on, the members of the police are not getting foodstuffs or quarters for residence. I want to make it known to the public that we have no enmity with the men in the Police Service, although we are making all possible efforts to remove the Government of which they consider themselves the servants. Therefore, if a policeman in uniform demands food or shelter authoritatively as a member of the Government, he should on no account be provided with it. But in case he claims it as a matter of courtesy and obtains permission from the Satyagraha Camp officer or the local Sardar, he should be supplied with all the necessary articles so that he may not be put to any trouble."

From April 16 to 21, 1930, many worthy sons of Bihar inspired by the motto of 'do or die' carried on Salt Satyagraha at Patna with heroic determination and courage in the face of ruthless police violence. Selecting Nakhas Pond, situated about three kilometres east of Mangles Tank in Patna City, as the place for violating salt laws, the Satyagrahis marched from the Patna Congress office at 9 A.M. on April 16 under the captainship of Ambika Kant Sinha,

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[2a] *The Searchlight*, April 20, 1930

Manager of *The Searchlight* and Secretary of the Town Congress Committee, for their destination. Undeterred in the least by police atrocities, the processionists squatted on the ground at the junction of the main road leading to the Bihar College of Engineering. Following the arrest of the leaders of this batch, another batch of volunteers wanted to proceed under the leadership of Pandit Ram Briksh Sharma Benipuri, who too was soon arrested. These volunteers were obstructed near the Sultanganj police station. But they did not leave that place and remained there till late in the night. The people of that area supplied them food and also some mattresses on which they slept.

On receiving the news of what had happened at Patna, Rajendra Prasad rushed there from Chapra on April 16 and proceeded to the scene at about 12.30 in the night along with Anugraha Narayan Sinha, Acharya Kripalani and Mathura Prasad. He saw the volunteers sleeping on the street and the police standing at a short distance. Early next morning Rajendra Prasad again visited the site, asked the volunteers to remain where they were and to be non-violent in the face of assaults.[3] He presided over a meeting held near by. Acharya Kripalani, Professor Abdul Bari and Mathura Prasad also spoke. After briefly tracing the progress of the Salt Satyagraha in Bihar till then, Rajendra Prasad made an appeal for recruitment of a large number of volunteers, exhorted the people to be ready for greater sacrifices and "to be perfectly peaceful and non-violent even when they witnessed scenes of horror and excitement and to regard him as the traitor to the motherland who induced them to throw brickbats and to commit any similar violence."[4]

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3. *The Searchlight*, April 18, 1930
4. *The Searchlight*, April 19, 1930 (Special Issue)

At the request of Cousins, the District Magistrate of Patna, Rajendra Prasad saw him after the meeting. He thus reported the result of this meeting in an interview with *The Searchlight* : "Mr. Cousins, the District Magistrate, told me that if I withdrew the volunteers he would treat the matter as closed. I told him that volunteers had been assaulted on the previous day without provocation and without justification and it was not possible for me to give any such instruction. He said he agreed there was no counter-attack but they were an unlawful assembly and had to be dispersed by force after they had been warned more than once. I further said that it was not in our present programme to disobey the Police Act and it was not our present intention to precipitate any action against the Police Act but after the previous day's assault I could not withdraw them. He then told me that I was taking a very serious responsibility and that he would take very drastic action and use force to disperse them. I told him I understood that and as then advised I could not withdraw them but before finally deciding I would like to consult other friends. He said that he would wait for an hour and wanted me to regulate my watch according to his. I told him that was not necessary and if no reply came before the end of the hour, he should take it that none was coming. After consulting friends and before the hour was over, I told him on the phone that as it was not our intention to start Satyagraha against the Police Act, I was prepared to advise the volunteers not to go in a regular formation as a procession but to walk in the streets as others were walking provided he or anybody else responsible for yesterday's assault expressed regret. He suggested at first that they might go one or two together but on my saying that the number would be larger, he suggested that they should not carry emblems. I told him so many people were going with flags in the streets that it could not be said to be a procession unless they went in a regular formation. He said it was a question of fact as to whether the effect produced on the public would be that they were going in a procession. He ultimately expressed his unwillingness to discuss the previous day's happenings for which he was responsible. I told him that on that view, I was afraid, he would have to do what he thought best and I would do what I considered best for me."

The policemen engaged against the Satyagrahis were Muslims from Baluchistan under the command of two Englishmen, Churcher, Assistant Commandant M. M. P., and Walker, Assistant Superintendent of Police. Considering the Satyagraha to be "a religious war", which "should not stand in the way of others attending to their religious duties"[5], Rajendra Prasad wrote to the District Magistrate of Patna that as Friday next besides being a Good Friday was also a day of congregational prayer for the Muslims, volunteers would not be sent out on that day. On receiving this letter in the evening, the District Magistrate felt some doubt if its writer was serious and if what he had suggested was not a face-saving device to extricate himself from a difficult situation. So, he telephoned Rajendra Prasad to see him next morning. Rajendra Prasad met him at the appointed time and convinced him about the seriousness of his proposal. The District Magistrate suggested alternative routes for the volunteers, but Rajendra Prasad did not agree to it.

Rajendra Prasad and other leaders of the Satyagraha at Patna planned to send Satyagrahis to Sultanganj in batches, four times in 24 hours, at fixed times, informing the District Magistrate accordingly. In the morning of Saturday,

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[5] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 309

April 19, a batch of five Shahabad volunteers proceeded towards Sultanganj police station to offer Satyagraha. They were arrested, but they prevented one European police officer from snatching away their flags. Some Satyagrahis who came later were ignored; but many were mercilessly assaulted and seriously wounded.[6]

A crowd had naturally gathered in a wide area extending from Sultanganj to the front of the Patna College: They were peaceful but the police, led by English Sergeants on horseback, sought to disperse them with terrible atrocities, "belabouring all and sundry, kicking, fisting and batoning".[7] A Police Officer made a "savage attack" on Prof. Abdul Bari when he was trying to control the crowd in front of the Patna College and dealt three blows with batons upon him which were followed by strokes with a hunter. Acharya Kripalani, while standing near the gate of the T. K. Ghosh's Academy, opposite Patna College, was assaulted by some policemen with *lathis*. The policemen charged "the crowd with their horses and whipped them right and left."[8]

After the police had dispersed the crowd on the road, Rajendra Prasad, Acharya Kripalani, Abdul Bari and Badrinath Varma began to move on the road from east to west, when one of the Police Sergeants pressed Prof. Abdul Bari from the back with his horse. Another Police Officer pressed against Rajendra Prasad and the officers shouted 'get along' by poking them with their batons. Prof. Bari was hurt also by the hoofs of the horses. Still both the leaders moved on quietly and pacified the people who "received blows with courage and determination and there was no attempt at retaliation".[9]

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[6] *The Searchlight*, April 20 and 21, 1930

[7] *Ibid*

[8] *Ibid*

[9] *Ibid*, April 25, 1930

But the outrages perpetrated by the police shocked the sentiments of all classes of people at Patna, whether they were Congressmen or not. To protest against these, a mammoth meeting of persons of all classes and communities and of all shades of opinion was convened by the eminent citizens of Patna on Tuesday, April 22, at Bhanwarpokhar ground (Patna), under the presidentship of Hasan Imam, who had been very much moved when Mrs. Hasan Imam, an eye witness on the day of police atrocities, had reported these to him. While proposing Hasan Imam to the Chair, Sachchidananda Sinha observed that "they were united in their condemnation of those outrages. Such outrages were indefensible and could not be tolerated." Probably this state of public feeling led the Government executive to withdraw the mounted police on April 23 and a batch of volunteers proceeded without obstruction to Nakhas Pond and manufactured salt calmly.[10]

This work progressed in other parts of the Province due to the enthusiasm and courage of the local leaders and other Satyagrahis, many of whom were subject to intense Governmental repression. In Bihar even a patriot like Shrikrishna Sinha, "loved and respected all over the Province, was seen handcuffed with one of his co-workers while they were being removed from one jail to another". Leaders of the movement were arrested at other places, too. Hearths and pots used for salt manufacture were forcibly destroyed by the police at different centres and at some places they assaulted the Satyagrahis, for example in Dhanha *thana* of Champaran. But still the number of volunteers increased and they did not slacken their activities. Vithalbhai Patel, who resigned the Presidentship of the Legislative Assembly, significantly wrote to the Viceroy on April 25, 1930 :

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[10] *Young India*, May 15, 1930

"Thousands are prepared to lay down their lives and hundreds of thousands are ready to court imprisonment."

Rajendra Prasad did not himself manufacture salt but he led the movement in Bihar by touring the districts, supervising the activity, addressing public meetings and giving encouragement to the Satyagrahis. In all areas people vied with one another in manufacturing salt. Rajendra Prasad auctioned the salt manufactured by the Satyagrahis wherever he went and utilised the amount to meet their expenses. After watching events for some time, the Government arrested Gandhiji on May 4, 1930 and took him to Yeravada jail. This caused much indignation among the people which found expression in hartals and strikes from one part of the country to another. On the evening of May 6, a large number of people assembled in a meeting at which Rajendra Prasad made a stirring speech.

Rajendra Prasad decided in consultation with other leaders of the Province to continue the Salt Satyagraha till the month of June, as after the commencement of rains salt manufacture would not be possible. In conformity with a decision at a meeting of the Working Committee of the Congress held at Allahabad from May 12 to 15, 1930 which Rajendra Prasad had attended, he asked the people of Bihar to carry on the programmes for boycott of foreign cloth and prohibition also and to be in readiness for non-payment of the chaukidari tax. A circular was issued by the President of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee on May 3, 1930, with a direction to the subordinate committees to start picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops from May 16. Since then propaganda for such work was carried on vigorously and with much success by Rajendra Prasad and other leaders. Thus he, along with Prof. Abdul Bari, went to Bhabhua and Sasaram towards the end of May to encourage the foreign cloth boycott and prohibition movements. The traders co-operated with them. In Bihar most of the foreign cloth dealers in the district towns or in smaller towns or bazars agreed to place no further orders for foreign cloth, packed their stock and got the same sealed by Congress Committees in their respective areas. Picketing of shops became necessary only in rare cases.

Women also contributed their mite to the success of the movement. While inaugurating the Satyagraha, Gandhiji had issued an open letter to the women of India asking them to foster the cause of nationalism by participating in the activities for boycott of foreign cloth and prohibition of intoxicants. In Bihar there was a grand response to his call. At Patna particularly many ladies, headed by Mrs. Hasan Imam, moved through the streets requesting people not to purchase foreign cloth. Vindhyavasini Devi organised such activities with much enthusiasm.

During this Satyagraha, the situation at Bihpur in the Bhagalpur district had taken a very serious turn with many shocking incidents. Here the Governmental machinery out-Heroded Herod and perpetrated cruelties on the Satyagrahis with ruthlessness in disregard of human feelings, honour and life, which exceeded in their severity even the Patna outrages of April, 1930. Some of the Congress volunteers, who lived in an Ashram near the Railway Station, had begun picketing liquor and *ganja* (hemp) shops. At this on May 31, 1930, A. R. Toplis, the District Magistrate of Bhagalpur, went there, accompanied by the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent of Police, and a body of armed and ordinary policemen. The volunteers were severely beaten by the police, who snatched away from them the national flag and burnt it and raided and got possession of the Congress office, the Khadi depot and the *Charka Sangh* by turning out their inmates. With a view to recovering the Ashram and other buildings, the volunteers offered peaceful Satyagraha by going there in batches of four or five from June 2 to 6. But the police belaboured them so furiously that some fell unconscious as a result of gruesome injuries. This caused a sensation in and around the locality and many people assembled in a meeting in a mango orchard near the Congress office. Policemen, headed by a European officer, indiscriminately assaulted the crowd both on that day and the day following.

On hearing this tale of police terrorism at Bihpur, Rajendra Prasad hurried to that place accompanied from Patna by Baladeva Sahay, Abdul Bari, Gyan Saha, Secretary, Bihar Provincial Seva Dal and Murli Manohar Prasad, Editor of *The Searchlight* and from Bhagalpur by Anant Prasad and Kamaleshwari Sahay, two Bihar M.L.Cs., Upendranath Mukherjee, President of the Bhagalpur District Congress Committee, and Yakub Ariff, an ex-Member of the Legislative Assembly. A crowd of about twenty thousand assembled there. Under the advice of Rajendra Prasad, it remained peaceful and non-violent amidst grave provocation. After a meeting addressed by Rajendra Prasad, Abdul Bari and Yaqub Ariff was over at 5 P.M., a procession of volunteers proceeded towards the Congress office which had been already seized by the police, but they were arrested and kept in custody in a primary school building. The people, who had been watching the events from a short distance, were furiously and indiscriminately charged by the police with *lathis* under the orders of the Superintendent of Police. Having thus cleared the road, the Superintendent of Police with his party rushed towards the bazar where Rajendra Prasad and some others were standing, and asked his men to charge them also though they had done nothing and they dealt *lathi* blows on such respectable persons. Most of them including Rajendra Prasad were injured. Prof. Abdul Bari was hurt seriously and he was bleeding profusely. A local doctor dressed their wounds before they took a train for Bhagalpur where Rajendra Prasad stayed for two days. The police arrested Upendranath Mukherjee, President of the Bhagalpur District Congress Committee, Mewalal Jha, Secretary, Bhagalpur District Congress Committee, and Satyadeva Roy, President of the Bihpur Thana Congress Committee, on the charge of joining unlawful assemblies.

Satyagraha was resumed at Bihpur on June 21, 1930, and continued till it was stopped according to the instructions of the Congress as a result of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in March 1931. Every day batches of volunteers went to the Ashram, and were arrested, beaten and tortured in other ways.

Government's policy of ruthless repression, instead of suppressing the Satyagraha, gave additional impetus to it. The report of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee for the week ending June 13, 1930 noted : "The spirit which was attempted to be crushed has steadily grown with every attempt at suppression, and now there is no more enthusiastic area in the Province bubbling with life and energy as the locality round Bhagalpur." The Bihpur Satyagraha "electrified Bhagalpur", wrote Rajendra Prasad.

Public sentiment in Bihar was deeply shocked by the police outrages at Bihpur particularly for the attack on Rajendra Prasad and his party. Anant Prasad and Kamaleswari Sahay resigned their seats in the Legislative Council and there were resignations by some other legislators also. *chaukidars* numbering 215, six *sarpanches* and some *dafadars* also resigned their posts under protest.

Considering the unique position of Rajendra Prasad as the most revered national leader of the Province, the Government had proceeded rather cautiously in arresting him, and instructed their officers on April 17, 1930 that he "should not be arrested without reference to Government".

By the middle of June the Government's view was that "proceedings may be taken against him and he may be arrested without reference to Government, *if there is clear case against him,* under the provisions of the Prevention of Intimidation Ordinance or the Unlawful Instigation Ordinance or the Police (Incitement to Disaffection) Act (Act XXII of 1922) or for a substantive offence under the Indian Penal Code ...... The arrangements for his arrest and trial will require care, but the District Officers must use their own discretion about them." For sometime when Rajendra Prasad was constantly touring the districts, rumours were afloat about his impending arrest. On June 30, 1930, Vitthalbhai Patel visited Patna and in the evening a public meeting was held there in his honour. Hasan Imam attended this meeting for the first time in a Khadi dress. When Rajendra Prasad expressed to him his feeling that he might be arrested soon, he replied that work would not suffer even after his arrest. Rajendra Prasad then went to Chapra district on a three-day tour programme. When he was proceeding to Garkha he was arrested on the way on July 5. After meeting his relatives at his village home, he followed the police to the Chapra jail, where he was offered a "tumultuous welcome" by about 400 Satyagrahi prisoners, and a big crowd outside the jail gate had to be dispersed by the Warder's firing in the air. The Magistrate, who was ordered to try Rajendra Prasad's case, was known to him as one of his old clients while he was practising at Patna. As he did not offer anything by way of defence, the Magistrate sentenced him to six months' imprisonment. After a few days, Government arranged to send him to the Hazaribagh jail by a round-about journey *via* Banaras and Moghal Sarai to avoid popular demonstrations. But in spite of this precaution on the part of the Government, the news of Rajendra Prasad's arrest spread like wild fire and produced a tremendous stir throughout the province, adding to the determination and enthusiasm of the people to carry on the movement for boycott of foreign goods and non-payment of the *chaukidari* tax. At Rajendra Prasad's suggestion made before his arrest, Deep Narayan Singh of Bhagalpur accepted the leadership of the movement.

As a matter of fact, national discontent had been mounting high in all parts of India. The issue of the Indian Statutory Commission's Report in the month of June 1930 did not allay it, as its recommendations were considered to be reactionary and unsatisfactory by Indian leaders of different schools of thought. But in view of the extremely grave situation in the country, the Viceroy mooted on July 9 the idea of convening a Round Table Conference in London in October next and efforts were made by leaders like M. R. Jayakar and Tej Bahadur Sapru to evolve a compromise by a high-level talk with the Congress leaders. So, Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru were transferred from the Naini jail to the Yeravada Jail, Poona, for a meeting with Gandhiji. A joint interview of Jayakar and Sapru with the Congress leaders took place on August 13, 14 and 15, 1930. But the compromise negotiations failed to produce any result.

Several other national leaders of Bihar had been kept in the Hazaribagh jail. The Jailor, Narayan Prasad, knew Rajendra Prasad from his school days as his elder brother was a classmate of Rajendra Prasad and he often went to their house in Chapra. He arranged for Rajendra Prasad's accommodation with his friends, like Ram Dayalu Singh, Shrikrishna Sinha and Bepin Behari Varma, Deep Narayan Singh, and Swami Bhawani Dayal of South Africa joined him later. Rajendra Prasad spent his time mostly reading and spinning. After some time, with permission from the

Jailor, he learnt weaving by joining the jail workshops.

"We suffered no inconvenience at all", writes Rajendra Prasad, "in the jail. Friends in other wards used to meet us often with the permission of the jailor. We had some difficulty in getting books which were not given to us unless they were 'passed' by the police or a Magistrate"[11] as 'safe'. A compilation, containing some writings of Gandhiji prepared by Rajendra Prasad with an introduction, had already been published by Natesan & Co. of Madras. He now compiled another volume of Gandhiji's writings under various heads like Non-violence, Swaraj, Satyagraha, Education, and Khadi with a brief introduction for each. The manuscript of this work was just complete when he was released from jail and Gandhiji himself approved of the idea of publishing it. This idea appealed to one of Rajendra Prasad's intimate friends, Nibaran Chandra Das Gupta of Purulia, also a selfless patriot of high character, who, in the words of Rajendra Prasad, "looked upon Gandhiji's agitation not merely as a political struggle but also as a religious renaissance". He made some suggestions which were accepted by Rajendra Prasad. But the manuscript could never be printed. It was in the Sadaqat Ashram, Patna, and from there it was lost when the police seized it in 1932. Study of religious literature also kept Rajendra Prasad engaged for some time in the jail. Pandit Bharat Misra of Chapra and Pandit Vishnu Dutt Shukla recited to him and his friends the *Ramayana* and other scriptures. The principal *Upanishads* were studied by him for the first time. But he could not attend Swami Sahajananda's discourses on the *Gita* for lack of time. Along with Nibaran Chandra Das Gupta, he studied Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra.*

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[11] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 322

Among the inmates of the jail some produced a monthly magazine in manuscript called *Qaidi* (prisoner) and some got out another monthly called *Karagar* (prison). Both contained articles about the national movement. The chief contributors and organisers of these magazines were Swami Bhavani Dayal, Mathura Prasad Sinha, Ram Briksh Benipuri and Mahamaya Prasad. Some issues of these had pictures and cartoons prepared by Kumar Kalika Sinha of Gidhaur in the Monghyr district. Supply of newspapers in the jail was strictly limited to the overseas edition of *The Statesman* containing matter for which the 'political prisoners' did not have much interest. In this jail Rajendra Prasad developed greater intimacy with persons than what he previously had. "I shall ever cherish", he recorded, "the memory of those contacts I had in the Hazaribagh Jail. Swami Bhavani Dayal, Nibaran Chandra Das Gupta and Thakur Nawab Singh (of Sitamarhi subdivision in the Muzaffarpur district who joined the non-cooperation movement with his sons, nephews and grandsons) were some of them."

Rajendra Prasad was released on December 14, 1930, and the progress of the Civil Disobedience Movement was accelerated in spite of uninterrupted represssion in various ways and counter-propaganda on the part of the Government. Immediately after returning from Hazaribagh, Rajendra Prasad proceeded to Bombay to meet Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and some other Congress leaders. From Bombay he went to Allahabad to see Motilal Nehru, who had been released from jail on grounds of illness and had just come back from Calcutta after medical treatment. In spite of his bad health, he wanted to guide the movement.

Meanwhile, the Round Table Conference had met in London on November 12, 1930, without any representative of the Indian National Congress attending it. But it was adjourned *sine die* on January 19, 1931 though its work was not complete. On that day the British Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, delivered a valedictory address in which he observed: "The view of His Majesty's Government is that responsibility for the Government of India should be placed upon Legislatures, Central and Provincial, with such provisions as may be necessary to guarantee, during a period of transition, the observance of certain obligations and to meet other special circumstances and also with guarantees as are required by minorities to protect their political liberties and rights. In such statutory safeguards as may be made for meeting the needs of the transitional period, it will be a primary concern of His Majesty's Government to see that the reserved powers are so framed and exercised as not to prejudice the advance of India through the new constitution to full responsibility for her own government......His Majesty's Government, in view of the character of the Conference and of the limited scope at its disposal in London, has deemed it advisable to suspend its work at this point so that Indian opinion may be consulted upon the work done and the expedient considered for overcoming the difficulties which have been raised. His Majesty's Government will consider, without delay, a plan by which our cooperation may be continued so that the results of our contemplated work may be seen in a new Indian constitution. If, in the meantime, there is a response to the Viceroy's appeal to those engaged at present in Civil Disobedience, and others wish to co-operate on the general lines of this declaration, steps will be taken to enlist their services."

The Congress Working Committee met at Allahabad on January 21, 1931, with Rajendra Prasad in the chair. With regard to the declaration of the British Prime Minister it expressed the opinion that it "was too vague and general to justify any change in the policy of the Congress". At the suggestion of Rajendra Prasad the publication of this resolution was postponed till the next morning. But the same night Motilal Nehru received a cable from V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, Tej Bahadur Sapru and M. R. Jayakar for withholding the publication of the resolution till their return to India. This was done.

As a conciliatory measure for solution of the constitutional problem, the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, released Mahatma Gandhi unconditionally and also the other members of the Congress Working Committee "to give an opportunity for them to consider the Premier's statement at the Round Table Conference". As there was growing deterioration in the health of Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru was released on parole. During Motilal Nehru's last days Rajendra Prasad stayed with him at the Swaraj Bhawan, Allahabad. Motilal Nehru's condition grew serious and he was shifted to Lucknow for treatment but passed away immediately on reaching there on February 6, 1931.

On the same day, a group of Indian delegates to the Round Table Conference landed at Bombay and expressed the view that the "attainment by India of Dominion Status is no longer in dispute". Srinivasan Sastri, Tej Bahadur Sapru and M. R. Jayakar met Gandhiji at Allahabad and persuaded him to negotiate with the Viceroy. All the members of the Congress Working Committee, including Rajendra Prasad, went to Delhi with Gandhiji and stayed there with Dr. Ansari. Gandhiji had discussions with the Viceroy for several days and as a result of this, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed on March 5, 1931. Thus, as Gandhiji observed, the Congress "embarked deliberately, though provisionally, on a career of cooperation". The Government lifted the ban on the Congress Committees and the Congress Working Committee immediately issued instructions to stop

Satyagraha. Rajendra Prasad, President of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, then at Delhi, sent telegraphic instructions to this effect to his friends at Patna. He soon returned to Zeradei for the marriage of his younger son Dhananjay.

Rajendra Prasad held that "the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was of great importance because it was the first time the British Government agreed to negotiate a settlement with people's representative organisation".[12] The path for Congress participation in the Round Table Conference being cleared, the people's representatives could now examine the safeguards which the British sought to incorporate in the constitution for their own interests and finally the Congress was in favour of the idea of a federation, that is, a strong Centre with autonomous Provinces.

Rajendra Prasad "felt satisfied with the compromise".[13] From Chapra he went to Patna on March 12, 1931, and to explain the implications of the Delhi Pact, he prepared a tour programme fixing March 13 for visiting Monghyr and Bhagalpur, March 15 and 16 for Muzaffarpur, and March 17 and 18 for return to Patna.[14] But from the side of the Government there was no prompt implementation of the terms of the Pact. This naturally caused dissatisfaction among Congressmen in Bihar and elsewhere. Rajendra Prasad stated in a telegram sent by him to Gandhiji on March 12 : "Local Government's action in fulfilment truce terms niggardly and dilatory......great disappointment and discontent among prisoners and public, atmosphere of goodwill being vitiated." Two public meetings, attended by large numbers of men and women, were held at Patna. These were addressed by Rajendra Prasad who explained terms of the Delhi Pact. A resolution was passed "protesting against the indifferent attitude of the local Government towards the release of political prisoners". Popular discontent was running high. Meeting at Patna on March 20 with Rajendra Prasad in the Chair, the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee passed a resolution[15] expressing general dissatisfaction at the action of the Government in not giving effect to the terms of the truce with the promptness that it deserved.

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[12] *Ibid*, p. 132

[13] *Ibid*

[14] *The Searchlight*, March 13, 1931

Judgement in the Lahore Conspiracy Case and execution of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdeo on March 23, 1931 in defiance of the nation's appeal for commutation of the death sentences caused intense indignation throughout the country. The Indian National Congress met at Karachi in this tense atmosphere on March 29, 30 and 31, 1931. It passed a resolution endorsing the "Provisional Settlement", at the same time making it clear that the "Congress goal of *Purna Swaraj* still remains intact". The Congress authorised Gandhiji to be its sole representative at the Second Round Table Conference.

On his way back from Karachi, Rajendra Prasad visited Lahore, Jullundur and attended the anniversary of Gurukul Kangri at Hardwar. On returning to Patna he explained in detail the implications and significance of the resolutions passed at the Karachi session of the Congress at a public meeting held on April 8, 1931, at Mangles Tank, Patna City, and also issued an appeal to the people to keep themselves cool and unperturbed and not to believe any rumour that might reach them. He asked the Hindus not to interfere with the Mussalmans in the performance of their religious rites during *Bakr-Id*, even though they might feel hurt and hoped that they would find that a better and more successful way of saving and serving the cow. He also suggested the formation of conciliation committees in all localities by Hindus and Mussalmans and thereby nip in the bud any mischief that might arise. He further emphasised that the maintenance of peace and good relations among the different communities was of greatest importance, particularly at that juncture and that no sacrifice should be considered too great for it.

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[15] *The Searchlight, March* 22, 1931

Rajendra Prasad then tried hard for the release of the Satyagrahis in Bihar. He not only carried on correspondence with the Government on this matter but also met Sir Hugh Lansdowne Stephenson, Governor of Bihar and Orissa, and the Chief Secretary, M. G. Hallet, in this connection and achieved a measure of success. But still the Governmental machinery moved very slowly.

After their release, the Congress leaders and volunteers engaged themselves in constructive work. To encourage these, Rajendra Prasad toured several districts of the province successfully.[16]

On April 14, 1931, he toured the district of Champaran, where he visited places like Bagha, Piparia, Bettiah, Segowli, Dacca and Motihari. At each of these places he addressed public meetings which added to the enthusiasm of the people who had suffered much from unmitigated governmental repression. The next day he visited the villages where indiscriminate and wholesale looting by the police and military had taken place. The broken locks, chests and doors and grounds dug up were still eloquent witnesses of what terrible days the people of Champaran had to pass through. On his way back he addressed[17] a meeting on the Tilak Maidan at Muzaffarpur.

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[16] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 337

[17] *The Searchlight*, April 17, 1931

At a crowded public meeting of the citizens of Patna held in the Bhanwar Pokkar Park on April 15, 1931, Rajendra Prasad observed : "From today the Hindus and Mussalmans of Patna must take a vow that they would never quarrel with each other and would never break each other's heads. There were bound to be differences of opinion but that was no justification for breaking each other's heads. Baldwin was the leader of the Conservative Party but he would not think of assaulting his son because he belonged to the Labour Party. Lord Curzon would not kill his daughter for difference of opinion in matters political, but in India even without any difference of opinion they were massacring each other on account of ignorance and folly." He appealed to the people to control their temper even under the greatest provocation.

Rajendra Prasad presided over the fourth session of the Manbhum District Conference held on April 25 and 26. 1931, at Hutmura, a village near Purulia, and delivered a highly inspiring speech referring to various aspects of the national struggle and for observance of the terms of the truce. After a reception at Adra he visited Raghunathpur, where an address of welcome was presented to him at a highly enthusiastic reception. The next day Rajendra Prasad was taken to Purulia where three addresses were presented to him, the first two by the local Sahitya Sabha and the local Hindi Pustakalaya and the third by the Purulia Municipality on April 29.

In his reply to the last, he referred to the heroic role and sacrifice of the people of Purulia in the freedom struggle. He advised them to continue it with unflinching determination and to observe the truce terms.

Rajendra Prasad left Patna on May 1, to tour the districts of Darbhanga and Purnea. Accompanied by Abdul Bari, he visited Supaul on May 16, 1931, Bihpur on

May 18, addressed meetings at these places and opened a Khadi Depot at Sonbarsa. From May 19 to 22, they went to Bhagalpur, Sabour, Nathnagar, Rajaon, Banka, Sultanganj, Amarpur, Belhar, Panjwara and Colgong and appealed to the people to use *Khaddar,* boycott foreign cloth and enrol volunteers. In the next month, for six days they toured the district of Santhal Parganas.

Rajendra Prasad was also present at the Political Conference of the Jehanabad sub-division of the Gaya district, where in his speech, he asked the people to observe the terms of the Delhi Pact and to follow the instructions of Gandhiji for attainment of 'complete Swaraj' through their self-governing institutions. Referring to India's non-violent Satyagraha, he observed that it was an ideal fight for the whole world. The people of other countries were looking towards Indians with surprise that these disarmed people were fighting with such a great power, and in case they were successful, this weapon of Satyagraha would be useful for the whole world.

The tours of Rajendra Prasad in the Shahabad district in the months of August and September were followed by "increased activity on the part of the Congress workers in regard to picketing of foreign cloth shops"[18] and formation of *panchayats.* He opened a Khadi exhibition at Arrah on August 30 and addressed a meeting there next day. He again went to Arrah on September 26, 1931, accompanied by Shrikrishna Sinha and Baladeva Sahay, and unfurled the national flag in a meeting there. He went to Bhagalpur district in November, 1931, with Abdul Bari and addressed several meetings there, including one held at Lajpat Park, Bhagalpur, on November 28. He also spent two weeks with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel during the enquiry into the affairs regarding confiscation and auction of land in the Gujarat villages during the Satyagraha.

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[18] *Fortnightly Report of the Patna Commissioner for the period ending September* 27, 1931

Gandhiji attended the Second Round Table Conference in London but it could not effect a satisfactory settlement of the Indian constitutional problem from the national point of view. On landing at Bombay on December 28, 1931, he was deeply mortified to know that the political situation in the country had immensely deteriorated and Government had been using repression with vehemence through arrests and ordinances in different parts of it—Bengal, the North-West Frontier Province and the United Provinces. The Gandhi-Irwin Pact had become a dead letter. It was a moment of great strain for the national leaders, some amongst whom had been sent to jail. "We wanted to avoid Satyagraha; we were not mentally prepared for it just then", writes Rajendra Prasad, "but it was clear that the authorities were determined to suppress the movement".[19] Before taking any further step, Gandhiji sought an interview with Lord Willingdon, who had succeeded Lord Irwin as Viceroy in April 1931. But it was refused. So on January 1, 1932, the Congress Working Committee decided that, in the event of a "satisfactory response not forthcoming" from the Government, the country would resume Civil Disobedience in a non-violent manner.

There was no response from the Government, which launched quickly a furious, widespread and well-prepared offensive. Gandhiji and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel were arrested on January 4, 1932, and were kept in the Yeravada Central Jail. While returning from Bombay after meeting Gandhiji, Rajendra Prasad wired from the Itarsi Railway Station to some of his co-workers in Bihar to meet him at Patna just on his arrival there next day with the object of preparing, in consultation with them in a meeting of the Bihar Provincial Congress Working Committee, a plan for Civil Disobedience in Bihar before Government took any action against them. These telegrams were intercepted by the Government officers and did not reach the addressees. But some members of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee happened to be at Patna when Rajendra Prasad returned there with Mathura Prasad on the morning of January 3 and so he convened a meeting at the Sadaqat Ashram. When the meeting was over and several members had left the premises of the Ashram in the afternoon, the Police Superintendent of Patna arrived with some armed constables, cordoned off the Ashram, showed those who were there the Government notification declaring Congress organisations unlawful, took possession of the Ashram with its library and other properties, forced its teachers and students to quit it, unfurled the Union Jack in place of the national flag and arrested Rajendra Prasad and the other leaders present there. At night they were taken to the Bankipur jail where they were confined as 'B' class prisoners till they were shifted to the Hazaribagh Jail on January 11. Rajendra Prasad was sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment. This time in that jail there was more strictness than in 1930. The political prisoners were not allowed either to meet the other prisoners, or to visit the *karkhanas* inside the jail. Though Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Dr. Khan Saheb were then in the same jail, Rajendra Prasad and others could not see them at all. The latter kept themselves engaged in spinning and study of religious books of the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Muslims.

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[19] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 343

The general policy of the Government was one of more ruthless repression than before, marked by large scale arrests of Congress workers including women, lathi charges, outlawing of Congress organisations, forcible possession of Congress buildings and properties, realization of heavy fines, confiscation of private property, gagging of the Press, banning of hartals, promulgation of ordinances and opening fire on crowds. Soon the number of ordinances went up to thirteen. Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India, observed in the House of Commons on March 24, 1932 : "I admit that the Ordinances that we have approved are very drastic and severe. They cover almost every activity of Indian life." Churchill characterised these as "more drastic than any that were required since the Mutiny". In Bihar there was police firing on the people at Motihari on January 26, when they were celebrating Independence Day at Rosera in the Darbhanga District on February 10 and at Begusarai and Tarapur in the Monghyr District during the celebration of the Flag Satyagraha Day on February 15, and at Sheohar in the Muzaffarpur district on February 28.

But even in the face of such revengeful atrocities, bullets and in the midst of severe ordeals, the people, profoundly stirred by national feelings, continued the movement with unshakable faith and unflinching determination risking all things dear to them. When the leaders were arrested, others stepped into their places. Release of Rajendra Prasad from the Hazaribagh Jail in June inspired them further, though he became soon more occupied with the Congress affairs. He went to Banaras and stayed for some time with Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya who had been released. Then he went to Bombay and Calcutta to assist Congress workers in collecting funds.

There was a new complication in the political situation due to Gandhiji's resolve to "fast unto death" from September 20, on the publication of the Communal Award of the British Premier, Ramsay Macdonald on August 17, 1932, providing separate electorates for the so-called Depressed

Classes. Gandhiji was in the Yeravada Jail. On hearing of this resolve, Rajendra Prasad immediately proceeded to Poona where Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Rajagopalachari and some other leaders had also arrived after their release from jail. Joined by Thakkar Bapa, G. D. Birla and Purushottamdas Thakurdas, they soon opened negotiations with Dr. Ambedkar, Dr. Solanki and others, who represented the Depressed Classes. They also met Gandhiji in the jail with the permission of the Government and tried their utmost for a settlement. Their outcome was the signing of the Poona Pact on September 24, 1932, which almost doubled the number of seats reserved for the Depressed Classes to be filled up by joint electorates out of the panel of names originally selected by them alone. On acceptance of the terms of the Poona Pact by the British Prime Minister, Gandhiji broke his fast on September 26. Gurudev Tagore, who had also come to Poona at that time, offered his blessings by singing a song. "To-day in our determined effort, let us all join Mahatmaji", observed Rabindranath in a speech delivered by him at Poona on September 27, "in his noble task of removing the burden of the ages, the burden of disrespect upon the bent back of those who have been stigmatised by the accident of their birth, and the sinful denial to a large body of our countrymen of sympathy which is the birthright of all human beings."

Rajendra Prasad had stated sometime earlier that the Hindu society was on trial, and if it had any life in it, it must respond with a great and magnificent act. As a matter of fact, Hinduism responded splendidly to this call of the hour and one of the effects of Gandhiji's fast was to create a consciousness throughout the country in favour of the removal of the curse of untouchability. A representative meeting of Hindu leaders was held at Bombay on

September 30, where they took a pledge for the eradication of this evil and to facilitate this, an organisation called the Harijan Sevak Sangh was brought into existence with headquarters at Delhi and with G. D. Birla as President and Thakkar Bapa as Secretary. Its branches sprang up in different Provinces.

In Bihar anti-untouchability conferences were held at Patna, Arrah. Chapra, Jehanabad (Gaya district), Bettiah (Champaran district), Bhagalpur and Monghyr. The Patna Conference held on November 6, 1932, under the Presidentship of Raja Radhika Raman Prasad Sinha of Surajpura, was attended by Thakkar Bapa and Rajendra Prasad. A Provincial Anti-untouchability Board was set up here and affiliated to the All-India League. The renowned scholar, Dr. Bhagwan Das, presided over the Chapra conference.

The Harijan movement ushered in a sort of social revolution by effecting elimination of the various disabilities to which the Harijans had been subjected. Efforts began to be made for extension of various privileges and rights to them and for permitting them to enter temples. After the Bombay meeting was over, Rajagopalachari took Rajendra Prasad to the South, where untouchability and other social restrictions were stringently observed. By holding meetings and in various other ways, they tried their best to get the famous temples of Madurai and Srirangam thrown open to the Harijans but could not succeed, though smaller temples were thrown open to them. On his way back Rajendra Prasad visited several places in Andhra where also the anti-untouchability movement began to progress and several temples were thrown open to Harijans.

There was opposition from certain quarters to the Harijan movement. But with Gandhiji removal of untouchability continued to be a deeply religious and moral issue. Moved by humanitarian considerations, the country as a whole had showed a highly liberal attitude by strengthening ties of cordiality with the Harijans and by working for improvement of their lot in all respects.

A Unity Conference was convened at Allahabad in November and December 1932, for communal harmony by settlement of some points of difference among different communities. It created an atmosphere of cordiality in the country and people became hopeful of agreement on almost all points. Rajendra Prasad played an important part in this Conference. The Conference adjourned for a week and was to meet again in Calcutta to settle the other points of dispute. It formally met in Calcutta. But the Government forestalled it by announcing that it agreed to 33½ per cent representation for the Muslims in the Central Assembly. Rajendra Prasad remained in Calcutta for a few days to collect funds for the Congress.

As regards the Civil Disobedience movement, Government renewed their repression to crush it outright. The Third Round Table Conference met in London from December 17 to 24, 1932, and the White Paper was issued on March 17, 1933. But this did not provide for a constitution suitable to Indian national interests and served to disillusion many of our moderate statesmen.

As acting President of the Indian National Congress, Rajendra Prasad issued some instructions which were read at meetings held at different places on January 4, 1933, anniversary of the Gandhi Incarceration Day, amidst lathi charges and arrests. Rajendra Prasad was arrested on January 6, when he was returning from Bankipore jail after attending a trial of Acharya Kripalani, who had been arrested at Patna on Januray 4. Rajendra Prasad's place as the Congress President was then taken by M. S. Aney. He was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment, Acharya

Kripalani to six months' imprisonment and Mathura Prasad, who happened to be there, to 18 months. They were all taken to the Hazaribagh jail and spent their time there in reading, writing and spinning.

Gandhiji again started a fast for 21 days on May 8, 1933, as a penance and a measure for purification of hearts for a moral cause. The Government issued a communique releasing him, as, they said, that his fast was solely connected with the Harijan movement. Immediately after his release, Gandhiji issued a long statement for temporary suspension of Civil Disobedience movement. Soon this movement began to wane and the earlier enthusiasm of the people disappeared. In July the Congress, meeting at Poona, and under Gandhiji's influence, decided to suspend mass Civil Disobedience but permitted individual Civil Disobedience. This was not liked by some prominent Congressmen including Jawaharlal Nehru. But Gandhiji himself wanted to start individual Civil Disobedience. He was, however, arrested on August 1 and soon sentenced to one year's imprisonment. On the refusal of Government to allow Gandhiji similar facilities as before for Harijan work inside the jail, he started a fast unto death on August 16. But in view of a serious deterioration in his condition, he was released on August 23. While touring Bihar, Gandhiji issued a statement from Saharsa in the then Bhagalpur district for withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience movement Rajendra Prasad, then in his company, agreed to his suggestion. Civil Disobedience was finally abandoned by the Congress at the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Patna from May 18 to 20, 1934. The Congress also passed a resolution for entering Legislature and appointed a Congress Parliamentary Board to run and control elections of members to the Legislatures on behalf of the Congress.

In July, 1933, Rajendra Prasad had an attack of asthma followed by an attack of dysentery in the Hazaribagh jail. As his condition deteriorated very much, he was transferred to the Bankipur jail and then to the hospital for treatment He was kept in a paying ward of the Patna Hospital under the treatment of Dr. T. N. Banerjee, an eminent physician. Just as he was on the way to recovery, he was taken back to the Bankipur jail, where the Jail Superintendent, who was also the Civil Surgeon of Patna, began his treatment. But soon he had another attack of asthma and his condition become grave. Under the advice of the Civil Surgeon, Government transferred him to the Patna Hospital. He agreed to go there on a distinct assurance that he would not be sent to jail again till he had fully recovered. Towards the end of December 1933, the doctors expressed to the Government much anxiety about his condition. To examine him, Government constituted a Medical Board consisting of Dr. T. N. Banerjee, the Civil Surgeon and the Principal of the Patna Medical College. The Board examined him in January 1934, and on its recommendation he was released from jail on January 17, 1934.

CHAPTER VII

THE BIHAR EARTHQUAKE

ON the afternoon of January 15, 1934, the day Rajendra Prasad heard that he was to be released soon, a dreadful and unprecedented calamity had occured affecting the Province of Bihar most severely. It was an earthquake which visited the Province as a veritable scourage of nature causing ravages of diverse kinds, which besides taking a heavy toll of human lives seriously damaged land and buildings, railways and telegraph lines. Those who survived this catastrophe were in great consternation and awe, apprehending total extinction.

Though still weak, Rajendra Prasad at once devoted himself whole-heartedly to relief work. The Government released other political prisoners also of those areas. In an appeal issued on January 29, Rajendra Prasad suggested the setting up of non-official agencies for relief work in the affected areas. The next day a meeting was held at Patna in which the constitution of a non-official committee, called the Bihar Central Relief Committee, was announced. This committee with Rajendra Prasad as its President, Baladeva Sahay and Maulavi Syed Mohammad Hafiz, two prominent advocates, as Secretaries, and R. C. Pandit of the Bank of Bihar as Treasurer, was to raise funds for relief and to take steps for proper provision of relief to the distressed. In response to Rajendra Prasad's appeal for funds, generous donations of money and other articles in the shape of rice, utensils, building materials, clothes, blankets and medicines began to pour in from all parts of the country. On January. 22, Rajendra Prasad informed the Provincial Government of the formation of the Bihar Central Relief Committee and assured them that in that humanitarian work of relief there could be but one consideration and that was to render such service as was possible. The Government replied to him next day appreciating his assurance for cooperation in relief work. In fact thousands of volunteers belonging to this Province and other provinces and working under non-official and official agencies worked indefatigably to provide relief to the sufferers in desolated Bihar. Jawaharlal Nehru came to Bihar at this time and toured for ten days "through torn and ruined territories."[1] Satish Chandra Das Gupta came from Bengal with some materials and money. Acharya Narendra Deo and Sri Prakasa came from the U.P. J. C. Kumarappa, a Chartered Accountant from the U.P., helped the relief committee in maintaining its accounts properly. Rajendra Prasad was "very punctilious" in the matter of accounts and everything received by the Bihar Central Relief Committee was utilised in the best possible manner. Jayaprakash Narayan was put in charge of the office located on the Exhibition Road, Patna, and later on, Anugraha Narayan Sinha, after his release from jail, became General Secretary of the Bihar Central Relief Committee.

A month after the earthquake, Rajendra Prasad visited the earthquake-affected areas and a bulletin was published by the Central Relief Committee to keep the donors and sympathisers informed about its services. Many public organisations also came forward for relief operations, the most prominent of them being the Ramakrishna Mission, the Marwari Relief Society, the Memon Relief Society, a party of Baba Gurdit Singh, the Red Cross Society, the Indian Medical Association, the Sankat Tran Samiti of Bengal under Satish Chandra Das Gupta, the Punjab Seva Samiti and the Sahayak Samiti, Calcutta. The Viceroy's Relief Fund and the fund contributed by S. K. Basu, Mayor of Calcutta, were well utilised for relief. Subhas Chandra Bose also felt much anxiety for afflicted Bihar and got into touch with Rajendra Prasad about it.

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[1] *Autobiography of Nehru*, p. 487

The Government of Bihar and Orissa also constituted a special department for dealing with the problems created by the ravages of the earthquake. W. B. Brett, I.C.S., was appointed Relief Commissioner. The Central Relief Committee offered full cooperation to the Government in the work of relief. A programme drawn up by the Managing Committee of the Central Relief Committee was sent by Rajendra Prasad to Brett on March 25, 1934, and the latter replied on March 27 that "subject to the remarks that in Tirhut the execution of drainage works and embankments requires the sanction of the authorities, for which you will doubtless apply in individual cases, the local Government see no objection to the various items included in the programme."

Immediate relief in the shape of food, blankets, clothing medicine and temporary shelter was provided to the affected people in two months and communications were restored at various places. These served to alleviate the woes of the people to some extent. But works of permanent character like reclamation of devastated lands, removal of sand from certain areas, sinking of wells for water and rehabilitation of persons who had lost their hearth and home presented problems of an enormous magnitude. These had to be tackled with great care and strain by both the Central Relief Committee and the official agencies. Even before the ravages of the earthquake had been completely repaired, Bihar was struck by the calamity of floods which brought in its train the epidemic of malaria. Assisted by a large band of devoted volunteers, the Bihar Central Relief Committee combated this malady also by making arrangements for medical aid, particularly in the districts of Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and Bhagalpur.

At this moment of acute hardship for the afflicted people of desolate Bihar, Gandhiji's tours in different parts of it supplied a moral force to the relief workers. Though Gandhiji had his own view about this earthquake, which he regarded as "a divine chastisement sent by God for our sins" particularly the "sin of untouchability", he suspended his trip to the South for Harijan uplift work and came to Bihar in response to Rajendra Prasad's call. "Whilst anti-untouchability work is undoubtedly greater and its message is of permanent character", he observed, "like all the chronic diseases, it can dispense with personal attention in the face of an acute case which that of Bihar is. He who is called by Rajendra Babu, the physician in charge, has to answer the call when made or not at all."[2]

Reaching Patna on March 11, Gandhiji moved from place to place in the earthquake-affected areas of Bihar, accompanied by Rajendra Prasad in most places. Excepting his journey to Assam and Orissa for a few days, Gandhiji remained in Bihar till May 20. On his Bihar tour Gandhiji had in his company two English women, Miss Muriel Lester who was Gandhiji's host in London at the time of the Round Table Conference, and Miss Agatha Harrison, a prominent Y.W.C.A. and welfare worker and Secretary of the Indian Conciliation Group in London. M. Pierre Ceresole, a Swiss pacifist and leader of the Civil Service International of Switzerland, came to Bihar in the month of May 1934, though he was more than 60 years old, and organised a volunteer corps for reconstruction work in the earthquake areas. He was also nominated by the Central Relief Committee to work on a local committee functioning in North

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[2] Quoted in Tendulkar's *Mahatma, Vol. III*, p. 252

Bihar for building houses and he stayed in the rural areas unmindful of personal comforts. When the relief works were over, the balance of the fund of the Bihar Central Relief Committee was placed by it at the disposal of a trust consisting of Sardar Patel, Seth Jamnalal Bajaj and Rajendra Prasad.

At this time Rajendra Prasad's brother, Mahendra Prasad, passed away. "My brother's death", he writes, "was a heavy blow and in the hour of calamity I turned to the *Gita* for consolation."[3] Mahendra Prasad was a prominent public worker of Bihar. Messages of condolence were sent to Rajendra Prasad by many persons including Gandhiji.

After his brother's death, Rajendra Prasad was placed in a difficult situation as he had not previously cared much for family affairs, his brother being in sole charge of them. He was worried about a heavy debt. The creditors, who at first began to press for repayment of their dues, agreed to wait for some time on an assurance from him that he would soon arrange for meeting all liabilities.

Jamnalal Bajaj, who came to his village to offer condolences to Rajendra Prasad in person, probably at the suggestion of Gandhiji, helped him in the matter of clearing off his family debts by disposing of a part of his estate. Rajendra Prasad transferred the remaining portion of the estate to Jamnalal Bajaj, who paid off the other creditors. As it was not possible for Jamnalal Bajaj to make payment for all, he sought Seth Ghanshyam Das's help in this matter. Thus the debts of Rajendra Prasad's family were cleared off. Jamnalal Bajaj had no intention of having a zamindari in Bihar. What he did was to help a friend in need. So he mortgaged out the estate to Rajendra Prasad's younger son, Dhananjay, on condition that he received the interest on the sum that he had paid and as far as possible the principal in instalments. After some time Rajendra Prasad's sons and nephews paid off large portions of the principal and interest from savings out of their own income, and so it did not become necessary to sell the zamindari mortgaged to Jamnalal Bajaj.

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[3] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 382

CHAPTER VIII

AS CONGRESS PRESIDENT

THE presidentship of the next session of the Congress to be held at Bombay was offered to Rajendra Prasad.

Before the forty eigth session of the Indian National Congress met at Bombay from October 26 to 28, 1934, the ban on the Congress organisation had been lifted by the Government and the Congress had been given the important task of expressing its opinion on the constitution which was being drafted according to the principles laid down in the White Paper and also about participation in the elections to the Central Assembly. The issues before the Congress were indeed momentous.

In preparing his Presidential Address, Rajendra Prasad took these matters into consideration. He showed his draft to Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha at Patna, who approved of his criticism, and he finalised it after consulting Gandhiji at Wardha. Amidst a rousing reception starting from the railway station onwards and with a huge procession moving along the road, he proceeded on a specially decorated carriage with his wife Rajbansi Devi, K. F. Nariman, Chairman of the Reception Committee, and Sarojini Naidu. This was the first occasion when his wife was with him at a public function and this was because Sarojini Naidu had insisted on it. Printed copies of Rajendra Prasad's Address were distributed at the Congress meeting and he read only portions of it because his experience was that "people did not like printed addresses". He conducted the proceedings of the Congress with firmness, strictly observing the constitutional procedures. At one stage when Pandit Madan Mohan

Malaviya wanted to speak for the second time on his amendment to the resolution on the Communal Award, he did not allow him to do so, pointing out that he was not entitled to it according to the rules. Gandhiji, who was not present at the meeting then and had heard its proceedings through a loud-speaker, asked him the next day jokingly as to how he could prevent a man like Malaviya from speaking. Rajendra Prasad replied that he was sorry for it but said that it was his "decision as President of the Congress, not as Rajendra Prasad."

On the eve of the Congress meeting, Gandhiji had issued a statement to the effect that he would like to retire from the Congress and would serve it as best as he could from outside. This caused a great sensation in the Congress, but Rajendra Prasad supported Gandhiji's view because he had the conviction that whatever Gandhiji wanted to do was not to weaken the Congress and his advice would always be available even when he was outside it. "The Mahatma's only aim was", Rajendra Prasad believed, "that on his retirement others would be prompted to think for themselves and the impression that whatever was done was done at his bidding would be removed."[1] Gandhiji also pleaded for amending the constitution of the Congress "so as to make the party more dynamic and more representative." According to the changes now made in the constitution of the Congress, spinning of 457 metres of well-spun yarn per month or some other form of manual labour as an alternative was made an essential qualification for membership of the Congress; no one was to be eligible for election to an office or to membership of any Congress Committee unless he was a habitual wearer of hand-spun and hand-woven *Khaddar;* the All-India Congress Committee was reduced to half its strength and the number of Congress delegates was cut down to a maximum of 2,000.

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[1] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 391

In his Presidential Address, Rajendra Prasad presented a brief but simple and unvarnished account of the trials and tribulations through which the country had to pass during the preceding three years and a half since its Karachi session. He observed plainly that if the people really wanted freedom they must recognise that "the need of the hour is not for a bigger or more inspiring programme, but for the determination to achieve what little we may set before ourselves". What was really wanted, he said, was "inexhaustible patience, unflinching determination and unending sacrifice". As a devoted nationalist Rajendra Prasad thought that the true goal for India was Independence, as Gandhiji understood it, and he believed in only one method by which it could be achieved, namely "active, dynamic, non-violent mass action" or Satyagraha which may "fail once or twice" but "in spite of temporary set-backs is bound to succeed some day". He asked everybody to bear in mind that "the price for freedom must be paid before we can get it, and while we have every reason to be proud of what has been done and what the country has suffered, it is, after all, yet inadequate for the great object we have in view". Rajendra Prasad quoted in conclusion James Lowell's message of hope :

"Truth for ever on the scaffold,
Wrong for ever on the throne,
Yet that scaffold sways the future.
And behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow
Keeping watch above His own."

The Congress also considered the proposed constitution of India, which included Ramsay Macdonald's Communal

Award. After prolonged discussions and criticisms, it neither accepted nor rejected it. It did not certainly endorse it. It was opposed to the White Paper proposals and demanded that the Constitution of India should be framed by a Constituent Assembly "elected on the basis of adult suffrage or as near it as possible." About the White Paper, Rajendra Prasad commented in his Presidential Address that its proposals "do not take us anywhere near what our Moderate Party aims at, *viz.*, Dominion Status, not to speak of complete independence which is the Congress goal. In fact, they take the country in some respects, in the opposite direction and leave it in a position constitutionally worse than that now occupied under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms".

Immediately after the Congress session was over, Rajendra Prasad formed a Working Committee with Acharya Kripalani as Secretary. He himself went to Wardha, as occasions arose, to consult Gandhiji instead of troubling him by seeking his attendance at periodical meetings of the Working Committee.

The general elections to the Central Assembly were held in November 1934. It was a crucial test for the Congress. But its popularity had increased and it had easy success in all the Provinces except Bengal where the caste Hindus had been very much dissatisfied with the Communal Award. Rajendra Prasad's illness till the month of December, 1934, prevented him from working actively for the elections, though he visited some places in Bihar. But the other Congress leaders, especially Sardar Patel, worked enthusiastically.

When the Central Assembly met in Delhi in January, 1935, a meeting of the Working Committee of the Congress was held there at the same time. Gandhiji attended it and in consultation with him Rajendra Prasad planned to tour the country immediately after the winter was over, with a view to revitalising the Congress. He selected Chakradhar

Saran, a Congress worker of Muzaffarpur, to accompany him on these tours.

Before starting on such tours he, as Congress President, made an earnest effort in February 1935, for communal unity and an agreed settlement by prolonged negotiations with M. A. Jinnah, President of the Muslim League, at Delhi from January 23 to March 1, 1935. But these produced no tangible result.

After the Delhi talks, Rajendra Prasad undertook a tour of the Punjab in the month of March, accompanied by Acharya Kripalani. Here both had bitter experience of rivalry and wrangles between two groups in the Congress, which caused them much inconvenience in various ways, and as an effect of drenching in heavy rains while moving in a procession Rajendra Prasad fell seriously ill. "This", he writes, "could have been avoided had the dispute between the rival groups not resulted in the alteration of the route of the procession which had been fixed previously".[2] Confinement in bed for some days at Lahore compelled him to change his tour programme and he returned to Bihar.

But from the third week of April 1935, Rajendra Prasad toured according to the programme previously drawn up by him. He organised a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Jabalpur in the Central Provinces in April and' attended a meeting of the Provincial Political Conference held in Berar under the presidentship of Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant. He then moved throughout the Berar district amidst profound enthusiasm of the local people. Next he made an intensive tour of Karnatak and Maharashtra visiting villages and towns. In Karnatak he inaugurated the Karnatak Provincial Conference at Mangalore. Driving in a car along the sea-coast of Karnatak, he reached Mysore

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[2] *Ibid*, p. 404

State and returned from there *via* Sholapur, Satara, Poona, Belgaum, Malvan, Ratnagiri, Ahmednagar and some other places addressing largely attended meetings wherever he halted. In Maharashtra, where the people are very fond of flowers, Rajendra Prasad was welcomed with basket-loads of flower-garlands. But he made an appeal to the people that he would prefer "to be presented with garlands of hand-spun yarn instead of flowers". There was a good response to it. As decided by the Maharashtra Congress Committee, he was given cash presents at all the places he visited. Out of Rs. 24,950 thus collected, Acharya Kripalani took a small portion for the All-India Congress Committee and gave the rest to the Maharashtra Congress for spending it locally.

Referring to these tours, the President observed in the course of an interview: "If the enthusiastic reception given to me, and the large meetings not only in large towns but in small *taluka* towns and even in wayside villages are any indication of the genuine enthusiasm for the Congress and confidence in its programme, I can say without any hesitation that the Provinces I have visited are full of it."

The tour of the President was scheduled to continue till June, but while on tour, Rajendra Prasad got the news of the devastating earthquake which rocked Quetta and the surrounding districts on May 31, and on some subsequent days. The Government did not allow relief parties from outside to go there. Rajendra Prasad issued a statement in protest and sent the following telegram to the Viceroy: "Public greatly agitated over refusal relief parties entering Quetta. Bihar experience shows living persons capable of being dug out from debris several days after quake. Earnestly request Your Excellency afford bonafide relief in Quetta and affected area." But the Government did not change its policy. Rajendra Prasad himself thought of going to Quetta to utilise the experience he had gained during the

Bihar earthquake for the service of the people there. But the Government did not give him permission for this, nor did he receive permission to conduct relief operations in the villages and the countryside. A Quetta Central Relief Committee was formed with Rajendra Prasad as President. He visited Karachi and all the towns in Sind where refugees from Quetta had come and under his guidance relief committees were started in the towns of Sind and Punjab.

About this time there was an awakening among the people of the Indian States and when the Congress met at Bombay there was a demand from some for intervention of the Indian National Congress in their affairs to enable them to have democratic institutions. But Gandhiji's idea was that the initiative for this should come from the people of these units and should not be carried there from outside. As President of the Congress, Rajendra Prasad made a statement to this effect. The Congress Working Committee resolved in July 1935, that "the responsibility and the burden of carrying on that struggle within the States must necessarily fall on the States' people themselves. The Congress can exercise moral and friendly influence upon the States and this it is bound to do whenever possible". At a meeting at Madras on October 17 and 18, 1935, the All-India Congress Committee endorsed this view of the Working Committee and the President made a statement clarifying the position. One good result of this controversy was that the people of the States began to stir themselves and organisations called *Praja Mandals* sprang up in most of these.

The Congress President spent the monsoon months in Wardha, Allahabad and Bihar. But after the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Madras, he started on his Tamil Nad tour from October 19 commencing from the city of Madras and the tour was completed on November 9. He visited 14 Congress districts and addressed about 116 meetings. Besides, he had to address a large number of wayside meetings not included in the programme. Everywhere, even in the remotest villages, the Congress President was accorded a warm reception. For obvious reasons, he had to address meetings there in English but in almost every meeting addressed by him he requested the people to learn Hindustani. He was gratified to note their satisfactory work about Harijan uplift. According to the directions of the Tamil Nad Congress Committee, a purse was presented to the President at places visited by him. The total of this fund amounted to about Rs. 20,421 of which twelve and a half per cent was sent to the All-India Congress Committee as its quota. On the last day of the President's tour in this area, he observed by referring to the purses presented by the villagers in copper coins only : "The nature of the purse itself is a proof of the fact that our message has reached the masses. Nowhere did I get a purse of more than Rs. 700 or Rs. 800. In some places I got big bags of money containing all coppers; I consider that to be very valuable. That shows that the masses have responded to its call."

Rajendra Prasad similarly toured Andhradesa from November 10 and Kerala from December 1 to 8, 1935, visiting all important places and also some remote villages. He received an enthusiastic welcome at all these places and women gathered in good numbers in all the meetings addressed by him. Except at half a dozen places, Rajendra Prasad delivered his speeches in Andhradesa in Hindi, which were translated into Telugu by Satyanarain of the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha. In Tamil Nad and Kerala, he had to speak in English.

The speeches delivered by Rajendra Prasad were promptly and rightly reported in *The Hindu*, one of the leading newspapers of India. During this tour he experienced the bitterness of Brahmin and non-Brahmin differences. He visited Tiruvannamalai. But his programme being very heavy, he could just call on the great saint, Raman Maharshi. Later, he came to this place with Jamnalal Bajaj, spent a few days here and visited the saint's Ashram almost every day. He also went to Chidambaram, famous for its Nataraja temple and for the Annamalai University, and stayed there for two days as a guest of its Vice-Chancellor, Srinivasa Sastri.

Rajendra Prasad had a pleasant trip of eight days in Kerala and he expressed regret that he could not visit Travancore State due to want of time. In these eight days he addressed 57 meetings and collected a sum of about Rs. 4,205 for Congress work.

In a speech delivered at Tellichery, Rajendra Prasad thus defended the Congress policy and programme of activities :

"I ask what is wrong in the Congress programme for achieving unity of the various communities which inhabit this land ? I ask what is wrong in encouraging the establishment of cottage industries which we have taken up as one of our important items of work ? How can we expect to win Swaraj if we continue to treat millions of our own people as untouchables in this very land ? These are problems which can command our services. I do not understand why people should run down this programme. It is easy enough to create discontent; it is easy enough to demolish what has been built; mere creation of discontent is no solution of the problem of poverty of this country. The Congress has, after fifty years of service and sacrifice by generations of men and women, succeeded in winning a certain amount of confidence of all classes. Does anyone imagine that this great affection which this great institution has won for itself is of no value in the struggle for freedom? I regard it as the greatest national asset which we have in our possession to-day, and I regard it as a great sin against the country if anyone wishes to destroy or to injure this prestige. I ask all friends who are interested in the freedom of the country to add to this prestige, to increase it, and if they cannot do that, at any rate, to leave it untouched. It is easy to destroy but very difficult to build. The Congress has been working as your mouth-piece for winning freedom. If the Congress is strong, it is because you have given it that strength." In his speech at the opening ceremony of the Khadi and Swadeshi Exhibition at Calicut, Rajendra Prasad appealed to the people "to encourage cottage industries and help the villages to regain their prosperity."

During his Kerala tour Rajendra Prasad visited Cochin and Kanya Kumari, where he felt inspired by nature's wonderful gifts, by the boundless expanse of the sea and by recalling how Swami Vivekananda came to the rocks there and fell prostrate at the feet of Bharat Mata. From the Cape to Puri he travelled by car along the seacoast. At Visakhapatnam he boarded a train for his journey to Raipur where he was to attend a function. From Raipur he went to Wardha. Thus ended his tour, as Congress President, of practically the whole region south of the Vindhyas.

A significant event of the year 1935 was the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Congress on December 28 according to an elaborate programme drawn up by it which included *Prabhat Pheries* before dawn, flag hoisting before 8.30 A.M., sale of national flags, processions in the afternoon, public meetings, illuminations in the night and exhibitions of Swadeshi goods. The principal function was to be held at the site where the first session of the Indian National Congress was held. On reaching Bombay, Rajendra Prasad learnt that Dinshaw Wacha, the oldest ex-President of the Congress and the only survivor of those who had attended the first session of the Congress, was seriously ill. He saw him in that condition to seek his blessings. On December 12, he opened the Khadi Exhibition at Bombay. In that city the Golden Jubilee of the Congress was celebrated in the same hall where the first session of the Indian National Congress was held. Rajendra Prasad unfurled the national flag. The event was celebrated in all important towns with due solemnity.

To commemorate the Golden Jubilee, the Congress published a *History of the Indian National Congress* (1885-1935) by Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, a member of the Working Committee. It was translated into Hindi, Marathi, Tamil and Telugu and some other Indian languages. Brochures on various subjects were also published at this time.

According to a decision of the Working Committee, Rajendra Prasad, as President of the Congress, issued the following message which was read out at the public meetings held on this occasion : "This day, fifty years ago, the National Congress met for the first time in Bombay with only a sprinkling of delegates who could hardly be called elected representatives but who were nevertheless true servants of the people of India. This Congress had the freedom of the people as its definite goal, but 'freedom' was an undefined word. It has now obtained a concrete shape; it means *Poorna Swaraj* or complete independence; it means control by the chosen representatives of India. It means freedom not for one class or race or clan, but freedom for all, including the poorest of her people. In order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include real economic freedom. The means for the attainment of that goal are also well defined. They must be legitimate and peaceful. These means have been knowingly adopted by the Congress since 1920. In their most acute form they have included non-violent non-cooperation, and civil, *i.e.* non-violent, resistance, under which thousands of people, men and women, have suffered imprisonment, confiscation of property and loss of their cherished possessions. Many have suffered personal injury, even death, through firing, lathi charges, and the like. For reasons well-known to all, civil resistance has been suspended.

"From a very small beginning the Congress has now become the most powerful political organisation representing the masses of India, and has branches covering the whole of the country from the Himalayas in the north to Kanya Kumari in the extreme south. Its present programme includes membership of the legislatures, revival of and encouragement to hand-spinning and hand-weaving, promotion of useful village small industries, reconstruction of village life in its economic, educational, social and hygienic aspects, removal of untouchability, promotion of inter-communal unity, total abstinence, national education, spread of useful knowledge among the adult population, organisation of industrial labour, organisation of peasants, and improvement of their economic condition by the revival of village industries.

"The Congress thus covers about every sphere of national activity. It has had the adherence of some of the noblest of men and women of India as also of the masses, who have responded to the Congress call to sacrifice. Such an organisation may well be proud of its achievement. But this is no time for jubilation, or resting on our oars. The work yet to be accomplished is great and needs much patient toil, endless sacrifice and unflinching determination.

"Let us bow down our heads to all those men, women and children—known and unknown—who have laid down their lives for the freedom of India, who have suffered woes and privations, and who are still paying the penalty for loving their motherland. Let us to-day also in grateful reverence recall the services of those who sowed the seeds of this mighty organisation, who nurtured it with their unremitting labour and sacrifice.

"The small seedling that was planted fifty years ago, has now grown into a mighty tree with branches spreading over this vast country, and has now blossomed in the sacrifices of countless men and women. It is for those that are now left behind to nourish the tree by their further services and sacrifices so that it may bear fruit and make India the free and prosperous country that nature intended her to be. Let this be a day of remembrance and of renewing our resolve to win *Poorna Swaraj*, which, in the late Lokamanya's words, is our birthright."

CHAPTER IX

ROLE IN CONGRESS ELECTIONS

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU presided over the forty-ninth session of the Indian National Congress held at Lucknow from April 12 to 14, 1936. Socialism had now influenced some prominent members of the Congress and the Socialist Party had already come into existence. Though not a member of this party, Jawaharlal Nehru had leanings towards socialism which became more pronounced after his European tour. "Socialism is thus for me", he observed in his Presidential Address, "not merely an economic doctrine which I favour; it is a vital creed which I hold with all my head and heart. I work for Indian independence because the nationalist in me cannot tolerate alien domination! I work for it even more because for me it is the inevitable step to social and economic changes". There were some differences in his attitudes with those of Rajendra Prasad and some other old members of the Congress. But these differences did not relate to fundamentals. Further, Jawaharlal Nehru, with his implicit faith in Gandhiji and love for the country, had, as he said, "no desire to force the issue in the Congress and thereby create difficulties in the way of our struggle for independence". As regards office acceptance by Congress members, Jawaharlal Nehru was against it and a similar view was held by the Socialist members. But the Congress Working Committee deciding in favour of fighting the elections did not commit itself at that stage to any decision about office acceptance before the elections were over. Rajendra Prasad moved this resolution in the open session of the Congress at Lucknow, but several Socialist amendments were moved to it. In replying to the debate, Rajendra Prasad strongly urged the adoption of the Working Committee's resolution. He observed in conclusion : "I do not believe people are down and out, or that the hunger for Swaraj is less. The only deficiency is that the people are taking time. Let us keep courage and office or no office, let us go ahead. The flame of Swaraj will never be extinguished until freedom is achieved. I believe that all Congressmen, both of the pro-office and anti-office view, have the same urge for freedom." The Working Committee's resolution was carried without division. About international issues connected with Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, Rajendra Prasad felt that it was premature for the Congress to express definite views then and so he advised "against going beyond an expression of sympathy for Ethiopia". Rajendra Prasad also moved the resolution of the Working Committee about the States' subjects to the effect that while the Congress had full sympathy with the States' people, the main struggle must be carried on by them, and it was carried without division.

A few days after the Lucknow session of the Congress, Rajendra Prasad went with Gandhiji to Wardha and from there to Nagpur to preside over the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan on April 24 and 25. In his Presidential Address to this gathering, he expressed his views regarding the tussle between the protagonists of Hindi and Urdu, about what was called Hindustani, about the use of foreign words in Hindi, and about borrowing foreign words for technical and scientific terms and expressions. About national language his view was that "Hindi is the only language, I think, on which the mantle of national language can fall, call it by whatever name you like—Hindi, Urdu or Hindustani. It will not, of course, displace the regional languages, which will continue to be developed and hold the field in their respective regions. The national language will be used only in all-India and inter-State affairs".[1]

The Sammelan formed a Rashtrabhasa Prachar Samiti with Rajendra Prasad as President for propagation of the language in the non-Hindi knowing areas. On his way back, Rajendra Prasad attended a meeting of the Congress Working Committee at Nagpur on April 28. He and Mathura Prasad left Wardha on April 30 and returned to Patna on May 2.

The year 1936 was marked by vigorous activities on the part of the Congress in preparing for the forthcoming elections to the Provincial Legislative Assemblies to be held early in 1937 according to the new Constitution based on the Act of 1935. In these elections the Congress wanted to put up 2,000 candidates as compared with only 100 candidates which had to be elected to the Central Assembly in 1934. To select the right type of candidates, pledged to follow faithfully Congress ideals and instructions, and to collect funds for election work were difficult tasks. As regards the first, the Congress drew up an election manifesto based on the Fundamental Rights Resolution of its Karachi Session. In this manifesto the Congress promised a reform of the system of land tenure and revenue and rent, and an equitable adjustment of the burden on agricultural land, grant of immediate relief to the smaller peasantry by a substantial reduction of agricultural rent and revenue now paid by them and exempting uneconomic holdings from payment of rent and revenue. The Congress also promised improvement in the lot of the industrial workers by securing for them a decent standard of living and providing for formation of their unions. The Congress workers were to move in their respective areas in order to disseminate among the people the message of the party and to explain to them the provisions of the election manifesto to rally their support to the cause of the Congress, of India, and of freedom.

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[1] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 423

The Provincial Congress Committees were to select candidates. But to avoid the influence of "splinter groups and factions in some provincial committees"[2], final selection was subject to the scrutiny of the Parliamentary Board of the All-India Congress Committee which was formed with Sardar Patel as Chairman and Maulana Azad and Rajendra Prasad.

Besides working with the Parliamentary Board, Rajendra Prasad had to do a lot of electioneering work in Bihar. He was elected President of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee in 1936 and under his guidance the Provincial Congress Committee made unanimous decisions in most cases and nominations were completed smoothly. Even when Rajendra Prasad held a contrary view, he "bowed to the majority opinion".[3] In some cases nominations were influenced by caste considerations. "It is a matter of shame", wrote Rajendra Prasad with regret, "that in Bihar, the P.C.C. had to take caste labels into account in certain constituencies because the success of candidates there depended on such considerations".[4] For the sixteen seats reserved for Harijans in the Bihar Assembly, the Provincial Congress Committee put up candidates for all by consulting prominent Harijan workers. Most of them were returned unopposed and in some cases of contest they were victorious.

Further, most of the names of the members of the Kisan Sabha suggested by its leader, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, were accepted by the Congress Working Committee and some cases of difference were amicably settled.

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[2] *Ibid*, p. 427

[3] *Ibid*, p. 429

[4] *Ibid*

From 1929-30 some complex socio-economic factors like world-wide economic depression, fall in the prices of articles, and a considerable set-back in the purchasing power of the agriculturists seriously affected the condition of the Kisans in our country, who had already been groaning under the evils of an inequitable land system, and gave rise to acute discontent among them in the U.P. and Bihar. This resulted in the rise and growth of the Kisan movement with much force, particularly in the districts of Patna, Gaya and Shahabad with Swami Sahajanand as its guiding spirit. In 1931 the tenants of Gaya wrote two letters to Jawaharlal Nehru, copies of which were sent to the General Secretary, All-India Congress Committee, Allahabad, and to Anugraha Narayan Sinha, Secretary, Bihar Provincial Congress, who replied to the former on October 26 that the condition of the agriculturists of the Gaya district was receiving their attention and a representative committee had been formed for that purpose under the chairmanship of Rajendra Prasad. Rajendra Prasad, Mathura Prasad and Shrikrishna Sinha visited several places in the Gaya district within a few days. A meeting, held at Aurangabad on November 12, 1931, was addressed by Rajendra Prasad at the request of the local learders. In the Shahabad district there was much agitation among the tenants against water tax. At its meetings held at the Sadaqat Ashram, Patna, on December 23 and 24, 1931, the Working Committee of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee considered the Report of the Agrarian Enquiry Committee and resolved that "on account of the abnormal fall in the prices of foodgrains (and) on account of great distress in the rural areas Government should be approached with a request to reduce the canal rates to the level of those which prevailed in the year when the prices of the foodstuffs were the same as those current in the present year, and further to postpone realisation till February next". Rajendra Prasad wrote a letter to this effect to M. G. Hallet, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, on December 24, 1931. The latter replied on December 29 that Government was looking into the matter. But nothing definite was done to remove hardships of the tenants. Though the Government took steps to restrain the activities of the leaders of the Kisan movement in Bihar, the movement gathered considerable momentum by 1936.

To facilitate election work in Bihar on behalf of the Congress, Rajendra Prasad toured[5] different parts of it in 1936 and 1937. He was at Gaya on January 14, 1936. Along with Shrikrishna Sinha, Anugraha Narayan Sinha, Ram Dayalu Singh and Mathura Prasad, he went to Chatra in the Hazaribagh district to attend a political conference on January 15 and 16, 1936. "Judging from every aspect", noted Mathura Prasad in his Diary,[6] the Chatra Conference was a success". The party returned to Gaya on January 17 and stayed for sometime at the Rajendra Ashram where Rajendra Prasad unfurled the national flag. On the morning of January 18 Rajendra Prasad, Anugraha Narayan Sinha and Mathura Prasad went from Gaya to Sherghati and Imamganj and returned there in the evening. After a trip to Calcutta on January 20 and 21, Rajendra Prasad returned to Patna in the morning of January 22. Halting for a few days from January 29 at Chapra and Zeradei, Rajendra Prasad and Mathura Prasad returned to Patna on February 7 and attended a public meeting in the Congress ground, where the former delivered an inspiring speech. They then left for Baidyanathdham (Deoghar) on February 9, and at a function organised in the local Govardhan Hindi Sahitya Vidyalaya, Rajendra Prasad delivered a learned speech on Hindi literature. They visited there the Shaheed Ashram, the Ramakrishna Mission and the Brahmacharya Ashram. They also went to the neighbouring villages of Chanan, Katoria and Kusha. On February 11, the party moved to Bhagalpur, Sabour and Bihpur. On February 12 they were at Madhepura and Supaul. On February 13 they came to Muzaffarpur and left for Purulia and Ranchi. On February 17, 18 and 19 they were at Kiul, Jamalpur and Bhagalpur and returned to Patna on the morning of February 20, started for Zeradei next day and remained there till February 25. Next day they went to Jamshedpur in a third-class compartment and left that place for Sawali on the night of February 27 to attend a conference organised by the Gandhi Seva Sangh. Gandhiji joined them at Wardha, and at Sawali, Rajendra Prasad delivered several speeches. Some other Congressmen from Bihar had also come there and the party stayed at Sawali till March 6. On their way back they halted at Swaraj Bhawan, Allahabad, on March 10 and 11, returned to Patna on March 12, left for Samastipur the same day and toured the Darbhanga district till March 15. On May 12 they were at Sonbarsa and returned to Patna next day *via* Muzaffarpur.

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[5] *The Searchlight*, December 24, 1931

[6] Details of these tours are available in the unpublished Diary of Mathura Prasad, a veteran Congress worker of Bihar and intimate associate of Rajendra Prasad, who accompanied the latter during these tours

The next session of the Congress was held at Faizpur, a village in Khandesh (Maharashtra) in December 1936, and Jawaharlal Nehru was re-elected President. His tours in Bihar early in January the following year gave a fillip to the enthusiasm of the masses here for election campaigns. Some other leaders like Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant and Acharya Kripalani also came here and addressed election meetings. As it was not possible for Nehru to visit all parts of the Province, Rajendra Prasad, instead of accompanying him, himself went to those parts which were not visited by Nehru.

After the elections were over in Bihar with a sweeping victory for the Congress, Rajendra Prasad undertook election tours in other parts of the country. He remained in U.P. for some days moving over several districts of Oudh, Dhampur, where there was a keen contest, and the Tarai (sub-montane) area where no Congress leader had gone before because it was not easily accessible to motorists. He went to only one place in the Tarai area and addressed a large gathering there which resulted in a Congress victory in that constituency by a narrow margin. He then went to the Central Provinces, visited some places near Katni in the Jabalpur district, and toured the Bilaspur district with much strain on himself. Next he proceeded to Maharashtra and Karnatak. He toured Maharashtra for several days, but there the Congress could not gain much success. In Karnatak also there were one or two "unexpected defeats" for it. Andhra was the last Province now visited by him and there he could tour only in the Bellary district. On his way back he halted at Wardha.

As a result of the elections, the Congress secured an absolute majority in six Provinces—Bihar, Orissa, United Provinces, the Central Province, Madras and Bombay. The intricate question of acceptance of office by the Congress members in the Legislatures then came up for consideration, and meeting at Delhi on March 17 and 18, 1937, the All-India Congress Committee decided in favour of the acceptance of office in the Provinces where the Congress commanded a majority in the Legislature provided the Ministership would not be accepted unless the leader of the Congress Party in the Legislature was satisfied and was able to state publicly that the Governor would not use his "special powers of interference or set aside the advice of Ministers in regard to constitutional activities."

The Provincial Legislature Parties then proceeded to elect their leaders. In Bihar, Rajendra Prasad convened a meeting of the Provincial Congress Committee and the Congress M.L.A's. Through his influence group rivalries were avoided and in consideration of all factors Shrikrishna Sinha, a fearless and self-sacrificing patriot, was unanimously elected leader of the Congress Legislature Party. Though there were some criticisms here and there, Rajendra Prasad had justly "a sense of satisfaction", as he writes, "for having done the right thing"[7].

Towards the end of March 1937, the Government invited the leaders of the Congress majority parties in the respective Provinces to accept appointment as Premiers and to form their own Ministries. But the Congress parties could not form Ministries in the absence of definite assurances as required by the Congress resolution referred to above. In Bihar, the Governor called Muhammad Yunus, the elected leader of the Independent Muslim Party's legislature group, for this business and the latter formed an *ad interim ministry*.

For three months there was a constitutional deadlock with statements and counter-statements both on behalf of the Congress and the Government. The Congress then devoted itself to constructive work. The Bihar National Week was celebrated from April 6 to 13, 1937. In April and May, Rajendra Prasad addressed the Champaran District Political Conference at Dhaka and the Gaya District Political Conference at Warsaliganj. A National Educational Conference met at the Sadaqat Ashram, Patna, from May 5 to 7, where also Rajendra Prasad was present, and a decision was taken to start a number of national schools of the Secondary and Middle standards under the Bihar Vidyapith.

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[7] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 438

After the interim Ministries had functioned for three months, the Viceroy made a statement on June 21, 1937, in which it was indirectly mentioned that the Governors would possess the special powers but these would not be used normally. This brought the deadlock to an end. The Congress Working Committee decided at its Wardha meeting held on July 8, 1937, that "Congressmen be permitted to accept office when they are invited thereto", provided they agreed to work "in accordance with the lines laid down in the Congress election manifesto and to further in every possible way the Congress policy of combating the new Act on the one hand and of prosecuting the constructive programme on the other."

The Provincial Congress Committees began to consider the question of personnel of the Ministries, formation of which had become certain. The Bihar Provincial Congress Committee met at Masrak, a village in the Saran district, with Abdul Bari as President. When Rajendra Prasad and the other Congress leaders returned to Chapra after attending this meeting, they heard that Shrikrishna Sinha had received an invitation from the Governor to form a Ministry. They had some preliminary discussions with Shrikrishna Sinha and then the Provincial Congress Committee met at Patna for final selection of the names of Ministers. This was not an easy matter. But considering that the Executive Council of the Governor in Bihar had only four members and to avoid any criticism regarding creation of jobs for needy men, Rajendra Prasad's advice was to limit the number of Ministers to four. He, however, admitted in the light of his later experience that the number of Ministers ought to have been more as they were "not familiar with administrative work", and so subsequently changed his view. The

Bihar Ministry was formed on July 20, 1937, with Shrikrishna Sinha as Premier, and the other Ministers were Anugrah Narayan Sinha, Dr. Syed Mahmud and Jaglal Chaudhury. Ramnarayan Singh, a Congressman and member of the Central Legislative Assembly, urged representation for Chhotanagpur in the Bihar Ministry. But for certain reasons, Rajendra Prasad could not agree to it. Ram Dayalu Singh and Abdul Bari became Speaker and Deputy Speaker, respectively. There were eight Parliamentary Secretaries, Binodanand Jha, Krishna Ballabh Sahay, Jagat Narayan Lal, Shiva Nandan Prasad Mandal, Jimut Bahan Sen, Sarangdhar Sinha, Jagjivan Ram and Sadiq-ul-Haque.

Rajendra Prasad's valuable guidance proved a great asset to the Bihar Ministry in all its activities. Reform of the land tenure system in Bihar for a rational improvement in the lot of the Kisans was a measure of first rate importance introduced by the Bihar Government. As has been already noted, the Kisan movement had developed strength of its own under the able leadership of Swami Sahajanand and an organisation of the zamindars, called the United Party formed in 1934 with Government support, had not been able to do much to mitigate their hardships. The Congress Ministry set itself the task of land reform with the advice of Rajendra Prasad. Being members of the Congress Parliamentary Board, he and Maulana Azad carried on negotiations with the zamindars and representatives of the Kisans, as a result of which an agreement was reached. It helped the Government in passing the Bihar Tenancy Act, which provided some measure of relief to the tenants.

But these did not satisfy the leaders of the Kisan movement in Bihar, who demanded more thorough-going changes and criticised the Congress Ministry for what they regarded as their failure to "carry out their elections promises to the Kisans". Their activities and fiery speeches at meetings threatened peace and the relationship between the Congress and the Kisan movement ceased to be as cordial as before.

Rajendra Prasad had to go to Orissa as there were some internal differences regarding the choice of the leader of the Assembly and the matter had been referred to the Parliamentary Board. Nilakantha Das, a veteran Congressman of that area since 1921, now aspired to be the leader of the Assembly, though in 1934 he had been elected to the Central Assembly on the Congress ticket and did not seek election to the Provincial Assembly in 1937. But according to a decision of the Parliamentary Board, the leader of the Assembly in the Province was to be a member of the Assembly. So Nilakantha Das could not be accepted as leader of the Assembly in Orissa, and Biswanath Das, who belonged to Berhampur (Ganjam district) and had been a member of the Madras Legislative Assembly when that district was included in Madras Province, was elected leader of the Legislature Party. By the end of July, 1937, Congress Ministries had been formed in the six Provinces of Bihar, Bombay, the Central Provinces, the United Provinces, Orissa and Madras. Rajendra Prasad and Maulana Azad went to the North-Western Frontier Province to assist the Congress group there to form a ministry. Their mission was successful due to the efforts of Dr. Khan Sahib and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and a Congress Government was formed there with Dr. Khan Sahib as leader.

This was Rajendra Prasad's first journey to the North-West Frontier province. After visiting several places there during the return journey, he and Mathura Prasad halted at Taxila where they went round to see the old ruins of historical importance and the museum where the materials obtained by archaeological excavations had been stored. Referring to the great importance of the Khybar Pass as natural defence. he expressed regret that in spite of it India could not defend herself in the past against external aggression. He commented that the "Khyber Pass and India's history bear testimony to the fact that no country can hope to derive benefit from natural barriers unless it is properly organised and is able to defend itself"[7a].

At the request of Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, Chief Minister of the U.P., Rajendra Prasad agreed to act as Chairman of an Enquiry Committee appointed to investigate into the conditions of the factory workers at Kanpur. While proceeding to Kanpur after attending a meeting of the Congress Working Committee at Wardha, Rajendra Prasad fell seriously ill from 'suspected food poisoning'. Still, after a short interval, he began his work at Kanpur. The main task in connection with the drafting of the report was done by Rajendra Prasad, B. Shiva Rao, who had much experience of labour organisations in Madras, and Prof. Rudra. Finishing his part of the work at Kanpur, Rajendra Prasad returned to Patna with the idea that after taking some rest he would draft the report. Here he attended a meeting of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, which after much discussion accepted the compromise formula about the tenancy laws. But owing to his illness, he went to Zeradei for rest and as his condition deteriorated he was brought to Patna Hospital for treatment. He was lodged for two months in the same cottage of the Patna Medical College, where Anugraha Narayan Sinha was also staying for his treatment after a motor accident and he met the latter after he began to feel well. With some improvement in his condition, he was in a position to complete the report about the condition of workers in the mills at Kanpur. His recommendations were opposed by the mill-owners and the workers also did not like certain features of it.

[7a] *Ibid*, p. 451

When Rajendra Prasad was still in hospital in a state of convalescence, a grave constitutional crisis developed in the U.P. and Bihar on the question of the release of political prisoners, which was demanded in various quarters according to one of the pledges of the Congress election manifesto. The political prisoners repatriated from the Andamans were confined in the Hazaribagh Jail where some of them went on a hunger strike from January 17, 1938. The hunger strike was brought to an end the following month through the intervention of the Prime Minister, Maulana Azad and Achyut Patwardhan. There were hunger strikes of political prisoners in other Provinces also. When the Congress Government wanted to release such prisoners, the Governors objected to it. To discuss this matter Maulana Azad met Rajendra Prasad in hospital and he also met Gandhiji and Sardar Patel in this connection. It was agreed that the Congress Government should press their point and in case the Governors did not agree to it, they should resign. The Governors did not change their views, and so the Congress Ministries in both the Provinces resigned.

This action of the Ministries in the U.P. and Bihar was approved by the Indian National Congress in its fifty-first session held at Haripura from February 19 to 21, 1938, with Subhas Chandra Bose as President. But after a statement issued by the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, on February 22 and Gandhiji's reply to it on February 23, the Ministers withdrew their resignations on February 26 and the constitutional crisis was over.

Rajendra Prasad was intimately associated with constructive work of the Congress Government in Bihar besides tendering help and advice to them in the matter of land reform. He accepted the chairmanship of a Labour Enquiry

Committee appointed by the Bihar Government. The other members of this Committee were Abdul Bari, Jagat Narayan Lal, M. P. Gandhi, Radhakamal Mukherjee, H. B. Chandra and R. K. Saran as Secretary. The Committee was to inquire into the living conditions and work of the industrial labourers in Bihar. This matter was of much importance in this Province because it has industrial factories of different kinds. Rajendra Prasad also participated in a joint conference organised by the U.P. and Bihar Governments for fixing the minimum prices of cane and sugar. Further, after being nominated to the Senate of Patna University from which he had resigned in 1921, he moved a resolution for the appointment of a committee to draw up a plan for an improved system of education from the primary to the University stage. The resolution was passed unanimously and the Government appointed an Education Reorganisation Committee with Prof. K. T. Shah as Chairman and Rajendra Prasad as a member. In a comprehensive report, this Committee made valuable recommendations for educational reform. Rajendra Prasad also agreed to act as a member of the Hindustani Committee, which was formed with Maulana Azad as Chairman, to help compilation of a dictionary of simple Arabic and Persian words which could be understood by Hindi-knowing people and could be used in writing suitable text-books. Besides all these, Rajendra Prasad was a member of the Parliamentary Committee of the Congress to which the Congress Governments referred important matters before any decision.

After being discharged from hospital by about the end of March 1938, Rajendra Prasad attended a meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh at Delang, near Puri, in Orissa. The Sangh used to carry out the constructive programme of the Congress under the guidance of Gandhiji, who was not a member of it. But it had as its members devoted nationalists like Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel and Jamnalal Bajaj. Under medical advice, Rajendra Prasad went to Nasik to stay at a health resort. Before going there, he drew up a plan for village uplift work at the request of the Bihar Government and selected Prajapati Mishra, a Congressman of experience, to be the head of the department for this work. At Nasik he had Ambika Kanta Sinha as his Secretary and, as his companion, a highly learned person named Daivarat Brahmachari of Gokarn in Karnatak, who, during his visit to the Sadaqat Ashram at Patna, had previous contact with him. Possessed of the profound knowledge of Sanskrit, the Brahmachari was well versed in India's ancient lore and could recite the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* from memory which he discussed with Rajendra Prasad during the day time. They went on a pilgrimage to Trimbak, the source of the Godavari. Here they saw some old caves with relics of ancient Indian art.

From Nasik, Rajendra Prasad went to Bombay in May to attend a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee, but could not take part in its deliberations due to illness which developed into broncho-pneumonia. A German doctor, who had then come to Bombay, attended on him, some other doctors of Bombay were consulted and Dr. M. D. D. Gilder, who was a Minister in the Bombay Government, also treated him. But as there was no improvement in his condition he, according to Gandhiji's advice, went to Wardha with him. He wrote to Dr. T. N. Banerjee and Dr. R. Saran of Patna to come to Wardha. The latter could not go but Dr. Banerjee reached Wardha, with Dr. Damodar Prasad, and under his treatment Rajendra Prasad began to improve.

During his stay in Bombay, Rajendra Prasad had heard of the unfortunate affairs of the Central Provinces Ministry due to differences between Dr. N. B. Khare, Chief Minister, and another Minister, D. P. Mishra, which led to a crisis inspite of his best efforts along with those of other leaders to effect reconciliation. After some wranglings Ravi Shanker Shukla was elected leader at a meeting of the Central Provinces Legislature Party. Matters came to a head and Khare was expelled from the Congress by the All-India Congress Committee in July 1938.

There was some difference of opinion among the leaders on the question of formation of a Congress Ministry in Assam. The Congress President, Subhas Chandra Bose, went there with Maulana Azad. The former advocated formation of a Ministry but Maulana Azad was not in favour of it. Rajendra Prasad and Sardar Patel were consulted on telephone. The former agreed with Maulana Azad as he felt that "in provinces where the Congress was not in a clear majority, it would not work effectively as the ruling party ......" Sardar Patel was in agreement with the opinion of Subhas Chandra Bose and a Congress Ministry was formed in Assam.

Unfortunately, there was at this time a Bengali-Bihari-controversy in Bihar regarding the position of the Bengal settlers there. The matter was referred to Rajendra Prasad, who prepared a report on it. Meeting at Bardoli in Gujarat from January 11 to 14, 1939, the Congress Working Committee adopted the Report of Rajendra Prasad and passed a resolution for the guidance of the Bihar and other Congress Governments.

There was an unhappy development in the Indian National Congress in the course of two months due to a controversy on the question of nomination of President for the fifty-second session of the Congress to be held at Tripuri near Jabalpur in March 1939. Many were in favour of Maulana Azad. But there were others who preferred re-election of Subhas Chandra Bose for a second term. So.

Maulana Azad wrote to the General Secretary of the Congress withdrawing his candidature. Then there was a proposal by some to nominate Pattabhi Sitaramayya, which was communicated to Rajendra Prasad at Patna by a telegram. He supported it. But in the election held on January 29, Subhas Chandra Bose was elected by a majority of 203 votes. Whatever may have been the reasons for difference of opinion among the Congress leaders, it caused a rift in the organisation at a very critical time. On the eve of the meeting of the Congress Working Committee to be held at Wardha, twelve members of it including Rajendra Prasad resigned from it as they "did not see eye to eye with the President"[8]. But their resignation was not finally accepted as Subhas Chandra Bose could not come to Wardha due to illness. So the old Working Committee continued when the Congress met at Tripuri in an atmosphere of tension from March 10 to 12, 1939. Gandhiji could not attend this session, as he had gone to Rajkot by undertaking a vow of fast unto death as a protest against breach of an agreement by its ruler.

Owing to the alarming state of his health, Subhas Chandra Bose, the President, could not attend the open session of the Congress. Its proceedings were conducted without the President in a disturbed atmosphere. Rajendra Prasad moved the resolution on Indian States passed by the Subjects Committee on the third day of the session. The resolution in conclusion said :

"The Congress desires to reiterate that its objective, complete independence, is for the whole of India, inclusive of the States, which are integral parts of India and which cannot be separated, and which must have the same measure of political, social, economic and religious freedom as a part of India."

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[8] *Ibid*, p. 481

A resolution moved by Govind Ballabh Pant was passed on the third day of the session. Its operative part was as follows : "In view of the critical situation that may develop during the coming year, and in view of the fact that Mahatma Gandhi alone can lead the Congress and the country during such a crisis, the Congress regards it as imperative that the executive authority of the Congress should command his implicit confidence and requests the President to nominate the Working Committee for the ensuing year in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji." According to this resolution, Subhas Chandra Bose carried on correspondence with Gandhiji on this matter. But the Working Committee could not be formed even after a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee in Calcutta from April 29 to May 1, 1939. Subhas Chandra Bose resigned from Presidentship on April 29. Rajendra Prasad was elected President on April 30 and next day he announced the personnel of the new Working Committee which included the names of Dr. B. C. Roy and Dr. P. C. Ghosh besides the 12 members who had resigned before on the election of Subhas Chandra Bose.

On the eve of his departure for Brindaban from Calcutta on May 1, Rajendra Prasad reiterated his close association with Bengal where he had spent fifteen of the best and most impressionable years of his life in Calcutta and said that some of his happiest memories belonged to those days. He, however, added that his task was particularly difficult, but he had faith that with God's grace he would be able to discharge his heavy responsibility to the best of his ability.

The reaction to Subhas Bose's resignation and to election of the new President was being watched anxiously by all who sought to bring about amity between the two groups in the Congress and messages about this were received by Mahatma Gandhi and Rajendra Prasad from different parts of the country. Rabindranath wrote, in the course of a message, to President Rajendra Prasad, appealing to him for immediately bringing about unity in the Congress ranks: "Evil symptoms of the spirit of disruption in the heart of the Congress have become painfully evident and a leader possessing a sober mind, unbiased judgment and a sympathetic heart is urgently needed at this crisis. Subhas's resignation has become unfortunately unavoidable." Continuing the Poet said: "I feel assured in my mind that your personality will help to soothe the injured souls and bring peace and unity into an atmosphere of mistrust and chaos. . . ." Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray also sent a similar message to the new President appealing for restoration of unity and solidarity within the Congress fold.

As Congress President, Rajendra Prasad remained busy in trying to solve internal quarrels among Congress leaders in Orissa and the Central Provinces and he had to perform the "unpleasant task" of asking Subhas Bose to quit the Congress owing to some untoward development in connection with Subhas Chandra Bose's protests against certain resolutions passed at the Bombay session of the Congress. He issued an appeal for observing May 21 as Political Prisoners' Day. Towards the end of June 1939, Rajendra Prasad presided over a meeting of the Secretaries of the Provincial Congress Committees held at Bombay and explained to them the changes in the constitution of the Congress adopted by the All-India Congress Committee for necessary adjustments in their own constitutions. When K. C. Kumarappa asked for a clear directive from Rajendra Prasad, the Congress President, and from the Working Committee, about the policy to be followed by the Congress regarding cottage industries and large scale industries, the Congress President replied that "so far as cloth is concerned, all competition with Khadi whether from foreign or indigenous sources is to be discouraged. So far as the cottage industries are concerned, the same principle will apply as soon as it is possible for the Congress to declare that a particular cottage industry has so far advanced as to be independent of mechanised industry of the class. Meanwhile, in regard to such cottage industries as are being sponsored by the Congress through its All-India Village Industries Association, it will be the duty of the Congressmen and Congress Governments to give them all possible support"[9].

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[9] Mitra, *The Indian Annual Register, 1939, Vol. II* p. 211

CHAPTER X

THE CRISIS OF WORLD WAR II

In his Presidential Address at the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee held at Bombay from June 24 to 27, 1939, Rajendra Prasad referred to the division within the Congress and many other problems which faced the country. "The danger of world war", he said, "is ever present and it might materialise in the course of a few months". So he asked the people to "be ready to meet this crisis and to resist all attempts to drag us into war, and thus give effect to the oft-declared policy of the Congress". He also mentioned some other vital problems before the country, *viz.*: ill-treatment of the Indians overseas at some places, deterioration of the situation in the Indian States where the rulers or their advisers were pursuing, with the support of the paramount power, "a policy of intensive repression, and in some cases, of unabashed gangsterism against their people", a stage of stalemate which was detrimental to the progress of the country; growth of communalism and sectarianism, and conflicts within the Congess itself. "The first and most urgent problem for the Congress, is, therefore", observed Rajendra Prasad, "to purify the organisation and make it a disciplined, and effective instrument of the people's will" and for "the service of the nation", so that "in the trials to come the Congress may be fully prepared to carry India's cause to a successful conclusion".

The crisis actually came when England declared war against Nazi Germany on September 3, 1939. Humanity was confronted with a grave and unprecedented ordeal in the face of this totalitarian and global war which assailed the very fundamentals of civilisation and threw out violent challenges to peace and democracy. For India, too, it proved to be a serious menace. Without consulting her national leaders, the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, declared India on September 3 to be a belligerent power and called upon her "to play a part worthy of her place among the great nations of the world".

The Working Committee of the Congress met at Wardha from September 8 to 15 to discuss the situation. As Rajendra Prasad was then not quite well, Gandhiji specially sent Mahadev Desai to Ramgarh to take him to Wardha. Jawaharlal Nehru also returned to India on the eve of this meeting. The Working Committee strongly condemned the ideology and practice of Nazism and Fascism. But in view of the great responsibilities in relation to the war, it protested against India being drawn into belligerency "without the consent of the Indian people" and issued a statement on September 14 inviting the British Government "to declare in unequivocal terms what their aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new order that is envisaged, in particular, how these are going to apply to India and to be given effect to in the present." A meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was convened at Wardha on October 9 and 10, with Rajendra Prasad as President. Before its proceedings were started, he thus explained the object for calling the meeting: "We are meeting here to discuss the situation which has arisen out of the war. The Congress and the All-India Congress Committee have from time to time passed resolutions defining our attitude. These resolutions, except the last one, were passed at a time when war was a possibility but was not actually going on. The latest statement of the Working Committee was adopted after the declaration of war. You will have seen from that statement that we have asked the

British Government to declare and define their war aims, with particular reference to India, in unequivocal terms. The present war, we are aware, is being waged by England and France against Germany. The declared objective is to free Europe from the constant fear of Nazi aggression and generally to secure freedom for all nationalities. We have expressed our detestation of Nazi methods of aggression. We have also expressed our sympathy in unmistakable terms with all those countries which have, from time to time, been made the victims of unprovoked attacks. We protested when Abyssinia was attacked. We expressed our sympathy with the democratic forces in Spain. We protested against the conquest and annexation of Czechoslovakia. We have expressed our sympathy with all the suffering nations. We have thus made our position perfectly clear. What we want is clarification of the position of the Allies and particularly of England. We are aware that in the past there have been occasions when the avowed objects for which a war was fought were not the real objects. The last Great War, fought with slogans of self-determination and 'making the world safe for democracy', did not fulfil any of these objects. We are, therefore, naturally doubtful if the professed aims of the present war are its real aims.

India at the present moment is not an independent country. If it were independent, it would have considered whether it should join the present war. Many other countries which sympathise with Poland have not joined the war and it is possible that with all our sympathies with Poland and with the best wish in the world to save the cause of democracy, we might have decided in favour of neutrality. If India is asked to help in a war for restoring and guaranteeing the freedom of Poland, is it any wonder that India should ask to be made free before she can render any help. It is no question of bargaining or taking advantage of difficulties of England. It is a simple and straightforward question that India asks. What part or lot can she have in a war waged for the freedom of other countries when her own freedom is denied to her by people who are fighting for freedom and democracy in Europe? We want a straight answer to that question. We have also said that a mere declaration will not satisfy us. We want that declaration to be given effect to the extent it is possible under present conditions. We see that there are individual groups, parties and communities in India who have put forward their own claims to be considered. If the British Government and statesmen once make up their mind to deal fairly with India and to give effect to the ideas which they profess in regard to the war, it should not be difficult for them to evolve a formula that can satisfy all parties and groups."

The All-India Congress Committee endorsed the statement of the Working Committee already referred to, and reiterated its demand to the British for declaration of their "war aims and peace aims". It also desired that "India must be declared an independent nation and present application should be given to this status to the largest possible extent" and that "Indian freedom must be based on democracy and unity and the full recognition and protection of the rights of all minorities to which the Congress has always pledged itself". The Muslim League's view was that it could extend cooperation to the Allies on recognition of the League as "the only organisation that can speak on behalf of Muslim India and an assurance that no declaration regarding the question of constitutional advance for India would be made without the consent and approval of the All-India Muslim League nor any constitution be framed and finally adopted by His Majesty's Government without such consent".

After discussion with no fewer than 52 Indian leaders of different points of view, including Gandhiji, Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, M. A. Jinnah and the Chancellor of Chamber of Princes, the Viceroy issued a statement on October 17 in which he harped on the old plea of the existence of "marked differences of outlook, markedly different demands, and markedly different solutions for the problems" before the country, and as regards the objectives of the British Government in entering the war, he repeated the statement of the Prime Minister made on February 6, 1939, that their Government were "seeking no material advantage" for themselves and were "not aiming only at victory, but looking beyond it to laying the foundation of a better system which will mean that war is not to be the inevitable lot of each succeeding generation." About India's future constitutional position, he reiterated the old pledge for the grant of Dominion Status and stated that the intention of the British Government was "to further the partnership between India and the United Kingdom within the Empire to the end that India may attain her due place among the great nations of the world." He was not for any constitutional changes during the war. But to meet the exigencies of the war situation, he suggested the addition of two more members to his Executive Council who, however, were to have no independent powers but were to be mere heads of departments. He also referred to the formation of a War Advisory Body "representative of all major political parties in British India and of the Indian States."

These assurances of the Viceroy did not in any way meet the legitimate demands of the Indian National Congress. In a statement on the Viceroy's announcement the Congress President, Rajendra Prasad, described it as "disappointing but not at all surprising". He said, "Its tragedy is that sympathy and goodwill in favour of Great Britain should have been allowed to dissipate leaving behind once again the jetsam and flotsam of suspicion, and distrust and ill-feeling...... There is no room left for anyone to doubt that British policy remains what it has always been and that all talk about democracy and resistance to aggression is not meant to apply to India." The Congress Working Committee meeting at Wardha on October 22 and 23 declared the Viceroy's statement to be "wholly unsatisfactory and calculated to rouse resentment among all those who are anxious to gain, and are intent upon gaining India's Independence". The Working Committee also issued instructions for resignation of the Congress Ministries in the Provinces as it was not possible for them to function effectively under the prevailing conditions.

The Congress Ministries resigned early in November 1939, and in pursuance of Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935, the Governors assumed control of legislative and administrative powers within the Provinces. The resignation of the Congress Ministries and the consequent absence of cooperation in war efforts from the greatest representative institution of nationalist India caused some uneasiness to the British Government. So, the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy still issued statements in sweeter language. They continued negotiations with Gandhiji, Rajendra Prasad, President of the Congress, and M. A. Jinnah. As the reply of the Congress to the statements of the Prime Minister and the Viceroy, Rajendra Prasad declared: "Let the British Government throw on Indians the responsibility of producing an agreed constitution without any interference from outside and promise to give statutory effect to it when produced. That will be a genuine offer. Without it all talk of protection of minorities looks like an excuse for perpetuating the *status quo*...."

The Congress insists on a charter of independence to be framed by a constituent assembly of representatives selected on universal franchise." There was no settlement and the constitutional deadlock continued.

Rajendra Prasad and other leaders of the Congress had genuine sympathy for Great Britain in that crisis and hour of adversity and they were prepared to render all possible assistance to her. All that they wanted was a clear assurance from the British Government that India would be given freedom after the war. "I can say", noted Rajendra Prasad, "that there was no bitterness in the heart of any Indian against the British and a large majority of Indians really thought it their duty to help Britain. They only wanted certain powers to enable them to carry out that duty. Without these powers the people could not be enthused"[1].

In December 1939, the Congress Working Committee decided to celebrate Independence Day with a special significance not only as the declaration of India's "national will to freedom, but a preparation for that struggle and a pledge to disciplined action". As President of the Congress, Rajendra Prasad issued the following appeal for Independence Day celebrations :

"Independence Day is drawing near. It is on this day every year since 1930 that we have renewed our pledge before our nation and the world that we shall not rest till we have achieved complete Independence and cast off the chains of foreign domination that bind us body and soul. To-day we are passing through critical times. Nations are at war with each other. Every nation that is weak and divided has to share the responsibility of death and ruin that threaten the world. The slave must share with the slave-owner the responsibility and odium of slavery. It is the weak that creates imperialism. Let this day, therefore, be a day of stock-taking. Let us search our hearts if we have not by our individual and national conduct prolonged our agony. Let us ask ourselves if we have been true to our high ideals, our noble purpose and the pure means which we have kept before ourselves to achieve our aim. Let each one ask himself, have I taken away every tinge of communalism from my life? Have I considered persons of other faiths and other views as my blood brothers? Have I as a Hindu done my little bit to wipe off the blot of untouchability? Have I allowed my individual ambition to stand in the way of the advancement of members of weaker communities? Have I been true to the masses? Have I lightened their burdens? Have I in my daily requirements and purchases remembered the starving millions distributed through the seven lacs of villages? Have I by my personal example given them an idea of what they could do to help themselves?

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[1] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 500

"If in this heart search we find that we have neglected these duties or performed them perfunctorily, let us, with humanity as our witness, this day—the day of our Independence—resolve that never more shall these duties be neglected or perfunctorily performed.

"The world is in the throes of a destructive war that threatens the very foundation of civilization. If the war is carried on by all parties with tainted motives, we may despair of any humane and equitable world order. What we do in the crisis is, therefore, not only of importance to ourselves but to the world. If by our non-violent means we can put an end to our internal strife and attain freedom, we will have proved to a doubting world that it can yet be saved without the aid of death-dealing instruments of war. We can do this only if we are true to our ideals and true to the leader who has placed this great weapon of non-violence in our hands. It is the weapon which even in weakness and defeat saves an individual and a nation their self-respect. Let us stick fast, therefore, to the anchor of non-violence. Let our non-violence be not of the weak but of the strong, fortified with the moral justice of our cause. In that spirit of faith and humility, let us take the Independence Pledge this year."

After returning from Tripuri, Rajendra Prasad along with some other leaders and Ramdas Gulati, an engineer who had stayed at Sevagram with Gandhiji, selected Ramgarh in Chota Nagpur as the site for the fifty-third session of the Indian National Congress. The Congress was to meet here in March 1940. The Executive Committee formed for this purpose met at Patna on January 8, 1940 and sanctioned the budget for this, fixed the quotas for the collection of funds from different districts and, on January 27, Rajendra Prasad spoke at a public meetting at Gaya, where an address was presented to him. Some amount of money was collected there for the Ramgarh session. This session met on March 19 and 20 under the Presidentship of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in a large and artistically decorated amphitheatre. All possible arrangements were made for comfort of the delegates under the supervision of Ramji Prasad Varma, an expert engineer and old Congress worker who had suffered imprisonment in 1930.

The Village Industries Exhibition was organised by Lakshmi Narayan, Secretary of the Charkha Sangh. To give an idea of the past glory of the historic land of Bihar, a book dealing with it was written under the guidance of Jaichandra Vidyalankar and published by Ram Lochan Saran of Laheriasarai, Darbhanga. Pictorial representations of some glorious historical episodes relating to Bihar were prepared under the guidance of an experienced Bihari artist Ishwari Prasad Varma of Patna, retired Vice-Principal of the Calcutta School of Art.

The Working Committee of the Congress had a meeting at Patna from February 28 to March 1, 1940. Soon after this Rajendra Prasad, who had been elected Chairman of the Reception Committee, left Patna for Ramgarh by car. Stopping at Nalanda, he saw the Archaeological Museum and the excavated buildings of the old university which had flourished in full glory in ancient days. His visit to this historic site increased, as he says, his "respect for the the great past of Bihar"[2]. Then he went to Rajouli and staying in the Dak Bungalow there for two days wrote his address as Chairman of the Reception Committee. Before the session started at Ramgarh, he had looked into all the arrangements.

On March 14, Gandhiji opened the Khadi and Village Industries Exhibition at Ramgarh. At the first sitting of the Subjects Committee of the Congress on March 17, Rajendra Prasad moved the main resolution on *India and the War Crisis,* recommended by the Working Committee at its meeting at Patna. It was seconded by Jawaharlal Nehru and accepted by an overwhelming majority.

Just as the main session of the Congress was to start, there was a heavy downpour of rain upsetting all arrangements. But in spite of this freak of nature, its proceedings continued. In his welcome speech, Rajendra Prasad deliberately left our "current problems and topical questions"[3] and presented a brief survey of the history and glories of ancient Bihar with the consciousness that we may "sometimes draw a lesson from the past and get inspiration from it". The main resolution on war crisis, passed by Congress, gave a clarion call to the people to be prepared for the inevitable struggle under the leadership of Gandhiji.

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[2] *Ibid*, p. 502

[3] *Ibid*, p. 503

Some national leaders of radical views, mostly of the Forward Bloc, organised at this time at Ramgarh the All-India Anti-Compromise Conference under the presidentship of Subhas Chandra Bose. They demanded an absolute non-compromise with the British Government. Swami Sahajananda Saraswati, Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Conference, Sheel Bhadra Yajee, Dhanraj Sharma and some others from Bihar took a leading part in it.

After the Ramgarh Congress, Rajendra Prasad got the report of the Education Committee completed and it was submitted to Government in three part, dealing with Primary Education, Secondary Education and University Education, respectively. About Primary Education the main suggestions of the Committee were on the lines of the Wardha system of basic education of which K. T. Shah, Zakir Husain and K. G. Saiyidain were the chief protagonists. The Labour Enquiry Committee's Report was also finalised and approved in 1940. Rajendra Kishore Saran and Radhakamal Mukherjee helped the Committee considerably with their deep knowledge of labour problems. For certain reasons, the work of the Hindustani Committee could not be completed before 1943.

On completion of the work of the Labour Enquiry Committee in Bihar, Rajendra Prasad went to Wardha to preside over a meeting of the Congress Working Committee from January 19 to 21, 1940. About a month after the Ramgarh session of the Congress, he joined a volunteers' training camp at Sonepur in North Bihar for a week from April 20. The total strength of the campers was 291. of whom 147 were members of the Provincial Congress Committee. Besides spinning and organising spinning classes, Rajendra Prasad used to give discourses to the people there every day on *Charkha,* technique of Satyagraha and allied matters. He laid great stress on constructive work as a means for training men "in the art of self-control and discipline, the essential qualities of a Satyagrahi"[4]. Such camps were organised also in the other districts of Bihar. Excessive strain on account of intensive work during the Ramgarh session of the Congress affected Rajendra Prasad's health and under medical advice, he took complete rest for a month in his village home at Zeradei.

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4. *Ibid,* p. 510

CHAPTER XI

EFFORTS AT RESTORING COMMUNAL HARMONY

BY June 1940, the international situation had become highly ominous and the war had taken a more menacing turn for the Allies. Quick successes of Germany in the summer of 1940, her alliance with Italy in June, fall of France in the same month and extension of German hegemony over Europe with rapidity not only placed Britain in a grave crisis but also caused tremendous anxiety in India. In this extremely critical situation, the Congress Working Committee had an emergency meeting at New Delhi from July 3 to 7, 1940. Rajendra Prasad attended it. It decided to ask the British Government to end the deadlock in the country by acknowledging the right of India to complete independence and to constitute a provisional National Government at the Centre in such a way "as to command the confidence of all the elected elements in the Central Legislature and secure the closest cooperation of the Responsible Government in the Provinces". In the opinion of the Congress this was necessary to organise "the material and moral resources of the country" for defence and help to Britain. But there was a difference of opinion among the leaders on one vital point which was discussed at length. Gandhiji wanted that India should completely stick to the policy of non-violence and did not favour the idea of extending active help to Britain in war effort. He had a firm faith about India offering moral support to Britain by maintaining non-violence. But most of the members of the Working Committee felt that they "were not able to take up the grave responsibility of declaring" that they "would completely eschew violence" when they "had to deal with wide-spread internal disorders in this country or external aggression". They were, however, quite clear in their minds that "so far as the struggle for winning independence was concerned non-violence would continue to occupy the same place in the Congress programme that it had occupied all these twenty years". Rajendra Prasad, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, J. B. Kripalani, Shankarao Deo and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan were prepared to go to the full length with Gandhiji. They tendered their resignation as members of the Working Committee, but withdrew it at the request of Maulana Azad, President of the Congress. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan could not be prevailed upon to withdraw his resignation. Gandhiji decided to sever his connection with the Congress. A meeting of the All-India Congress Committee, held at Poona on July 27 and 28, 1940, endorsed the Delhi resolution. At the Poona meeting Rajendra Prasad explained the view point of those who criticised the Delhi resolution and maintained that instead of opposing it he would remain neutral if there was a division. But others of his group opposed the resolution in spite of this statement.

At Poona, Rajendra Prasad had an attack of pneumonia but he somehow went to Wardha. After a slight recovery he, with the advice of Seth Jamnalal Bajaj and Gandhiji, proceeded to Jaipur to stay in a dry climate. But there was a relapse of the disease during the rainy season After some improvement in his condition, he, on the advice of some of his friends, spent a month in the dry sandy place of Sikar before returning to Patna. It was at Sikar that he began to write his autobiography.

The Delhi resolution was sent to the Viceroy. But it did not elicit a favourable response from the British

Government. Rather, the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, issued a statement on August 8, 1940 (afterwards known as the August offer). Reaffirming the promise about Dominion Status, the Viceroy made it clear in this statement that in any revision of the Constitution "full weight should be given to the views of the minorities". He further affirmed that the British Government could not consider the question of changing India's constitution "at a time when the Commonwealth was engaged in a struggle for existence" and that a representative body for reframing India's constitution could be set up after the war was over. He also observed that in the meanwhile, the British Government "will welcome and promote in any way possible every sincere and practical step that may be taken by the representative Indians themselves to reach a basis of friendly agreement". As for the immediate modifications, he pointed out that he had been authorised by the British Government to invite some prominent Indians connected with the political parties to join the Viceroy's Executive Council and also to establish a War Advisory Council to promote united efforts to meet the war situation.

The August offer of the British Government caused nothing but disappointment for Indians. It was aggravated by the observations of L. S. Amery, Secretary of State for India, in the course of his speech in the House of Commons on August 14 that the constitutional deadlock in India was due to lack of agreement mong the constituent elements in India's national life, *viz.*, the Congress, the Muslim League, the Scheduled Castes and the Princes.

The Indian National Congress considered this attitude of the British Government to be opposed to India's national interests. Meeting at Bombay on September 15 and 16, 1940, the Congress decided that it could not "submit to a policy which is a denial of India's natural right to freedom, which suppresses the free expression of opinion and which would lead to the degradation of her people." At this critical moment in the history of the movement for national freedom, it once again placed itself under the leadership of Gandhiji for guidance. As a moral protest against Britain's policy regarding India and her being dragged into war without satisfaction of her legitimate national demands, Gandhiji now advised individual civil disobedience of selected persons after taking care to avoid embarrassment to the Government by mass upheavals during the war. Only such persons were to be selected as had to their credit important constructive work. Further, participation in individual civil disobedience was to be restricted to persons who were members of representative bodies like the All-India Congress Committee, the Congress Working Committee, the Central and Provincial Legislatures and other local bodies and Congress Committees. Vinobha Bhave, selected by Gandhiji, started the movement on October 17 at the village of Paunar, about eight kilometres from Wardha, by delivering an anti-war speech. He was arrested on October 21 and sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

In Bihar, Rajendra Prasad had been advised not to join the movement on account of his ill health. So the responsibility for guiding it in this Province fell on Shrikrishna Sinha, another prominent national leader and ex-Premier. He inaugurated the movement here at the Patna lawn on November 28, 1940, with an anti-war speech. But when he was arrested and was being taken to the jail, there were noisy demonstrations by the crowd. Considering this to be against the instructions of Gandhiji regarding individual Civil Disobedience, Rajendra Prasad issued a statement condemning it and laying down instructions for future guidance. Anugraha Narayan Sinha, ex-Finance Minister and another national leader, who was to offer Satyagraha next on the same day, was asked by Rajendra Prasad not to do so till the people had agreed to observe the prescribed instructions strictly. One day after this, the people gave the assurance that such demonstrations would not take place and that they would follow the instructions faithfully. So the movement was restarted after two days in a peaceful manner. Anugraha Narayan Sinha was arrested for delivering a speech at Patna City. Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested at Cheoki, near Allahabad, on October 31 and was sentenced to four years' imprisonment. The Congress President, Maulana Azad, was arrested at Allahabad on December 30 and sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment. So, Gandhiji had to accept the responsibilities of Congress President, and he wanted that Acharya Kripalani, General Secretary of the Congress, whom he had kept out of the movement, and Rajendra Prasad, should stay with him to assist him in discharging these. Rajendra Prasad thus remained mostly at Wardha for a few months.

During this period Rajendra Prasad, at the request of H. C. Dasappa of the Mysore Congress Committee, and under instructions from Gandhiji, went to Mysore to inaugurate a political conference held at Harihar on the banks of the Tungabhadra. When the conference was over, Dasappa arranged a trip for him for sight-seeing. After visiting Mysore and Bangalore, they went to Shravana Belgola and Halebid and the exquisite specimens of ancient Jain and Hindu architecture at those places impressed Rajendra Prasad so much that he considered these two to be "among those places in the world which no one should miss"[1]. At Gersappa, the meeting place of Mysore and Madras, the magnificent waterfalls and some other beauties of nature provided a veritable feast for their eyes. From

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[1] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 517

Mysore, Rajendra Prasad returned to Patna. At Patna, he presided over a meeting which was held on April 21, 1941, to condemn kidnapping of men, women and children by some trans-frontier tribesmen and to express sympathy for the sufferers. To carry the message of the *Charkha* to every home and to push the sale of Khadi, an organisation was formed at Patna in a meeting convened here on the evening of April 24 with Rajendra Prasad in the chair.

A few days later Rajendra Prasad started for Wardha. When he was just getting into the train for this journey, he heard of Hindu-Muslim tension in Bihar Sharif but he did not cancel his trip as he believed that it would not develop into anything very serious. But unfortunately communal tension had been rising high for some time. The Congress claiming to be a representative body with a national outlook was opposed to communal organisations and it had within its fold Muslim members, and several Muslim organisations like the Jamait-ul-Ulema and the Ahrar, which instead of supporting the Muslim League co-operated with the Congress. What others described as the "unbridgeable gulf between the Congress and the Muslim League" was to Gandhiji "a domestic problem which will disappear if the British withdraw from India". In his Presidential Address at the Ramgarh session of the Congress, Maulana Azad emphasised the heritage of common nationality between the Hindus and the Muslims in India.

But various forces had already begun to fan inter-communal discord and to widen the "angle of differences" between the Congress and the Muslim League, which under the undisputed leadership of M. A. Jinnah claimed to be recognised as the "one authoritative and representative organisation of Mussalmans in India." In the opinion of Jinnah, " democratic system of Government in the conception of a homogeneous nation and the method of counting heads" was not workable in India, and under his direction the Muslim League observed a "Day of Deliverance" as a sign of relief on the resignation of the Congress Ministries in the provinces. At its Lahore session held in March, 1940, the Muslim League enunciated the theory that the Muslims were not "a minority" but "a nation...... and they must have their homeland, their territory and their State" (Pakistan), that is, the "areas in which the Muslims are numerically in the majority, as in north-western and eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute independent States in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign".

At the Madras session of the Muslim League, held in the second week of April 1941, Jinnah reiterated his demand for Pakistan and levelled several charges against the Congress. Referring to Rajendra Prasad, he observed on April 17 that he "would tell Babu Rajendra Prasad to ask his Working Committee to discuss it, if they have not already done so, apply his mind to it honestly and without prejudice".

On April 19, Rajendra Prasad issued the following statement[2] to the press in reply to Jinnah : "I have seen Mr. Jinnah's statement issued from Madras on the 17th April in which he has sought to make two points and charged me with turning and twisting things. The first point is that the Congress need not wait for the details of the scheme of Pakistan but should accept the principle forthwith and then the details may be worked out. The second is that the Congress is responsible for the failure of negotiations to arrive at a settlement and the Congress position has been most arrogant and dictatorial. I propose to deal with these points. I will take the second first.

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[2] *The Searchlight*, April 20, 1941

"I take it that Mr. Jinnah agrees that in the conversations which have taken place during the last three or four years between him and the representatives of the Congress, the two parties could never progress beyond the preliminary stage of settling their respective status and no concrete proposals for a settlement of the communal question had arisen". In support of his view, Rajendra Prasad quoted published correspondence which had passed between the Congress President, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Jinnah in 1938.

"Coming to the second question of Pakistan, I do not know why and how Mr. Jinnah has gathered that I am not opposed to the basic principles of the scheme of partition of India. I want details of the scheme of partition of India as embodied in the resolution of the Muslim League to enable me to judge its implications and to understand what I am expected to accept. The analogy of the joint Hindu family with which I am undoubtedly familiar does not apply in this case at all. For one thing does Mr. Jinnah admit that the Hindus and the Muslims of India have so far constituted one joint family and that a partition has now become necessary ? As I understand it, the *raison de etre* of the proposal is that Hindus and Muslims have always been, to-day are, and ever shall be in future two irreconcilable groups whose safety and salvation lie in a complete cutting of all relations and setting them up as two independent States. But that is only by the way. I will cite by way of illustration one or two points which will show why it is necessary to know the details before forming a final opinion on the proposal for Pakistan.

"The Lahore resolution of the League lays down the following basic principles, *viz.*, that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial readjustment as may be necessary that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the north-western and eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute indepenendent States, in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign; that adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards should be specifically provided in the constitution for minorities in the units and in the regions for the protection of the religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them and in other parts of India where Mussalmans are in a minority for whom similar safeguards are to be provided. Those basic principles have now been embodied in the creed of the League at its session at Madras which has just concluded.

"The first question which naturally arises is—what are the territories to be included in the two zones? Several schemes have been put forward. One scheme adumbrated by a 'Punjabee' in his book, '*Confederacy of India*' contemplates the splitting up of the continent of India into various countries and re-assembled in a confederacy of India. Two of the zones contemplated by the League resolution will be—(1) The Indus Region Federation with the Punjab (minus its eastern Hindu tracts comprising the Ambala division, Kangra district and Unao and Garhshankar tehsils of Hoshiarpur district), Sind, the N.W.F.P., Kashmir, Baluchistan, Bhawalpur, Amb, Dir, Swat, Chitral, Khanpur, Kalat, Lossbela, Kapurthala and Malerkotla. This will have a population in which 82 per cent will be Mussalmans, 6 per cent will be Sikhs and 8 per cent will be Hindus; (2) The Bengal Federation will comprise the prominent Muslim tracts of Eastern Bengal and Gopalpara and Sylhet districts of Assam and Tripura and other States. The districts of Bengal included in this will be Dinajpur, Malda, Bogra, Rajshahi, Murshidabad, Pabna, Mymensingh, Nadia, Jessore, Faridpur, Dacca, Tippera, Noakhali, Bakerganj, Khulna and Chittagong and their population will be 66 per cent Mussalmans and 33 per cent Hindus. The second scheme is that of Professors Syed Zafrul Hasan and Mohammad Afzal Hussain Qadri of the Aligarh University. They include in the North-Western State the whole of the Punjab besides other Provinces mentioned in the first scheme and some more States and reduce the Muslim population of this State from 82 per cent as in the first scheme to 60 per cent. In their Eastern State they include the whole of Bengal minus Howrah and Midnapur districts, Purnea District of Bihar and the Sylhet Division of Assam. The Muslim population in this State will be 57 per cent.

"The scheme of Dr. Latif of Hyderabad University in his *Muslim Problems in India* is not a separatist move involving endless complications but seeks to divide India into cultural zones.[3] I am, therefore, leaving it out of consideration here, as the question of establishing separate independent States is not raised by the author and I am not concerned here with the scheme of division into cultural zones. Dr. Ambedkar in his recent book *'Thoughts on Pakistan'* says that it is perfectly possible to create homogeneous Muslim States out of the Punjab, Bengal and Assam by drawing their boundaries in such a way that the areas which are predominantly Hindu shall be excluded. He proposes to exclude from Pakistan the districts of Gurudaspur, Amritsar, Hoshiarpur Jullundur Ambala, Firozepur, Ludhiana, Hissar, Karnal, Rohtak, Gurgaon and Kangra and the States of Chamba, Patiala and the Simla States. In

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[3] There was some correspondence about this scheme between Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Dr. Latif, vide, *The Pakistan Issue*, edited by Nawab Dr. Nazir Yar Jung, 1943

Bengal he excludes from Pakistan the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Burdwan, Bankura, Hoogly, Midnapur, 24 Parganas and Khulna and the States of Tippera and Kooch Bihar. He excludes from Pakistan the whole of Assam (except the District of Sylhet) as also the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the State of Manipur.

"These three schemes differ considerably from one another and involve large populations of Hindus and Mussalmans who are expected to decide to which State they consider it desirable and feasible to belong. Mr. Jinnah is constantly complaining that the Hindus and the Congress aim at subjecting the Muslims to Hindu rule. To use his own words how many Hindus and other non-Muslims and what areas does he want to subject to Muslim rule in these two zones? Is there anything wrong or preposterous in asking for details on this point before coming to a decision?

"Again, the League resolution says that the two zones shall constitute 'Independent States' in which constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign. Mr. Jinnah in his speech at Madras is reported to have said that 'the goal of the All-India Muslim League is that we want to establish a completely independent State in the north-western and eastern zones of India with full control finally on Defence, Foreign Affairs, Communications, Customs, Currency, Exchange, etc.' This evidently means that these Muslim States will have their own forces, their own foreign policy, etc., which need not coincide with that of the rest of India. They may have their own tariff wall and their own separate currency and exchange policy. In other words, they will be completely sovereign States with no obligations to the rest of India and expecting no obligations from the latter. Let us take, for example, the question of defence. Dr. Ambedkar has collected figures to show the position, as it is and as it will be, when Pakistan is created.

RESOURCES OF PAKISTAN AND THE REST OF BRITISH INDIA

	Area	*Population*	*Revenue*
*Pakistan**	2,88,968 Sq. miles	8,02.83,931	Rs. 60,56,38,326
Rest of British India	6,07,657 Sq. miles	17,85,18,919	Rs. 96,26,05,206

"These are gross figures from which deductions will have to be made. If Pakistan is to be, as Dr. Ambedkar has contemplated, of predominantly Muslim areas of the Punjab and Bengal excluding the predominantly Hindu areas, then the revenues of Pakistan and the Eastern Muslim State will be Rs. 36 crores and that of the rest of British India Rs. 120 crores. The Muslim States in the North Western and the Eastern Zone will have to maintain their own defence forces out of their revenues of Rs. 36 crores and whatever other additions may be available as a result of development of further taxation. The rest of India will, of course, have to maintain a separate defence force if it is so minded. These forces being of independent countries will have to maintain all arms, a land force, a navy and an air force with all necessary equipment of a modern army.

"Considering the composition of the defence forces, Dr. Ambedkar quotes the Simon Commission to show that out of a total of 158,000, the north-western block, which will fall within Pakistan, contributes no less than 98,400 soldiers or more than 62 per cent while the rest of British India, apart from Bengal and Assam which contributes no soldier at all, supplies less than 38 per cent of the defence force. As the Muslim and non-Muslim States are to be completely independent States, 62 per cent of the existing fighting force will have to be either disbanded or transferred to Pakistan and the rest of India if it so choose will have to raise its own army from among its own population. The above figures are taken from the report of the Simon Commission and are about 12 years old. The present figures will probably show a larger proportion of soldiers in the army from the north-western zone, as it has been the consistent policy of the Government to encourage recruitment from this area and to restrict if not altogether to avoid it from other areas. These figures suggest questions which will not be easy to answer. Does Mr. Jinnah contemplate a homogeneous Muslim army for Pakistan excluding Hindus and Sikhs from it and similarly a homogenous non-Muslim army which will largely be Hindu and Sikhs and other non-Hindus but will exclude Muslims for the rest of India? He contemplates reciprocity but there can be no interference by one country into the affairs of another independent country. The composition of its defence forces cannot in any case be dictated to one independent country by another and reciprocity in a matter like this can have no meaning. The only ultimate sanction which two independent countries have against each other is war. War does not come about easily because one country does not interfere with the internal affairs of another. There is no question of reciprocal arrangements which are sought or expected to be enforced against each other in day-to-day administration. The whole edifice of reciprocity which is contemplated in the safeguards falls to the ground once you admit the independent and sovereign status of the two States and regard them as independent countries.

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*Includes N.W.F.P., Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan and Bengal

"To turn to the question of foreign relations. It will be possible for the independent States to have separate and even conflicting foreign polices, and Pakistan as well as the rest of India will be exposed to diplomatic action which is only another name for intrigue of foreign powers and Pakistan and Hindustan will in no time be set by each other's ears as we see what is happening in Europe.

"The independent States will have their own independent economic and exchange and currency policies. Each will encourage the development of its own resources and keep out goods from the others. It may be worthwhile investigating what natural resources like coal, iron, copper, petroleum, mica, bauxite, forests, etc., each will have and how each will stand with regard to existing development and future programme of development of resources.

"Is it wrong to ask for details in all these respects and on so many other points which can be easily put forward before we do decide about the fate of this country? Mr. Jinnah would have us vote blind-folded and would not permit us to wait till he has worked out the details.

"In this statement I have not touched upon the general question of the unity of India. If Mr. Jinnah wanted a general answer to a general question without going into details himself and without expecting us to go into details, he has got it more than once when the Congress has declared that India is one and indivisible. One would have thought that Pakistan was suggested as a solution of the communal problem. It does not touch that question at all as it leaves Muslim minorities in the so-called Hindu India and Hindu minorities in the so-called Pakistan as they are to-day. The problem will not cease to exist because Pakistan has been created any more than it has ceased to exist because there are in existence to-day the independent Muslim States of Afghanistan, Persia, Turkey and the Arab States and the independent Hindu State of Nepal. One would like to know from Mr. Jinnah how and in what respects Pakistan will differ from these existing independent Muslim States and if it will not differ how it will be able to give protection to the Muslim minorities in the rest of India any more than these existing independent Muslim States have been able to give."

Reactionary forces and continued propaganda strained the relations between the two communities more and more and ignited the flame of communalism under the influence of which serious communal riots broke out at Bihar Sharif. Immediately on hearing of these unfortunate incidents, Mathura Prasad, Rajendra Prasad's Secretary, and Shah Muhammad Ozair, Secretary of the Provincial Congress Committee in Bihar, rushed in the summer months of 1941 to Bihar Sharif. Some conciliation committees were formed and high Government officers had also gone there. But all this could not check communal frenzy. After receiving a telegram from Sachchidananda Sinha on May 3 that a dangerous situation had been developing in Bihar, Rajendra Prasad hastened to Bihar. On his return here, he informed Gandhiji by telegram that the situation though panicky was improving. In a statement issued by Gandhiji from Sevagram on May 7, 1941, he expressed his conviction that "the chief burden for the voluntary preservation of peace lies on the shoulders of the Congress, the oldest, the best organised and the most popular organisation in India", and that for this it had "to invoke the assistance of all parties, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha and some others. At present Bihar is the Province that can lead the way and set the example. Rajendra Babu has a gentle and unique hold in his Province such as no other leader has. He is the hero of the earthquake days when the whole of India put its trust in him. May he have too the privilege of being the messenger of peace in Bihar and through Bihar may be throughout India."

On returning to Patna, Rajendra Prasad at once proceeded to Bihar Sharif with Prof. Abdul Bari, a selfless and brave national worker of perfect integrity, a batch of teachers and students of the Bihar Vidyapith and some others. They toured the riot-affected areas and the situation was brought under control. Rajendra Prasad discussed the matter with S. M. Ismail, President of the Muslim League in Bihar, who had also gone to Bihar Sharif and was touring the different localities there. Both of them came to Patna for a day and on May 13 or May 14 addressed a representative gathering of Hindu and Muslim citizens of Patna in a meeting organised under the auspices of the Patna Peace Committee. Rajendra Prasad observed that in a country like India peopled by diverse communities the way of non-violence was the only way to maintain peace and tranquility. If anybody spoke of another way, he was out to turn that land of theirs into a jungle of brutes where the law of force reigned supreme. If somebody indicated the way of violence as the basis of communal relations, he did a definite disservice to the country. If there were men who refused to play the game, there was no sense in making a grievance of it. What concerned an individual was whether he did his duty and played his part well. Patna and Bihar, despite sporadic communal outbursts, had a tradition of communal goodwill and fellow-feeling and it was up to the inheritors of the tradition to see that the fair name of the capital of the Province was not sullied. Then going back to Bihar Sharif, Rajendra Prasad went about consoling the victims of riots and pacifying incensed men. Congress Seva Dals (Peace Brigades), formed according to his advice under Prof. Abdul Bari, also worked hard to restore peace.

Rajendra Prasad toured other places in the Province propagating the message of communal harmony. "Misdeeds and atrocities of either community instead of raising its reputation in the eyes of the world put it to shame and no community can call itself stronger by indulging in such cruelty and brutality, which have sanction of no religion". said Rajendra Prasad, while addressing the Azad Muslim Conference which met on May 29 at Bagha in the Motihari district under the presidentship of Maulana Hafizur Rahman. He asked both the communities to have tolerance and assured them that it would be paying to both alike in the long run.

The Azad Muslim Conference had its meetings also at Islampur in the Purnea district on June 2 with Maulana Hannan of the Frontier Province in the chair. Rajendra Prasad, Professor Abdul Bari, Mathura Prasad and Shah Ozair Munimi, besides a large number of eminent Mussalmans from the Frontier, were present. The Conference was adjourned to June 3. As it rained the whole night and the following morning, there was no sitting of the Conference at the time fixed and Rajendra Prasad left for Tikapatti Ashram to preside over the annual meeting of the Ashram. He exhorted the people to take to spinning and other industries that were yet being carried on in the villages, such as basket-making, mat-weaving, etc. He expressed regret that some of the best men of the district and organisers of the Tikapatti Ashram like Kishori Lal Kundu, Lakshmi Narayan Sudhansu, Baijnath Prasad Choudhary, Phani Gopal Sen and others were in jail but those who were left behind should keep the Congress flag flying and carry on the programme of work which had been so dear to the persons now undergoing imprisonment. Continuing he mentioned that those were trying times when the world was passing through a great crisis and only associations and their organised efforts would keep the people ready and alert for all eventualities. He further emphasised the need for communal harmony and expressed his hope that there would be no further communal disturbances in this Province. In conclusion he observed: "We have to keep ourselves up-to-date and well informed of all that is happening around us and those Satyagrahis who are not arrested or those who are in the approved list as also every individual Congressman and worker for the cause should consider himself as a soldier working for the Congress with the weapon of truth and non-violence and try his level best to lift up the depressed and down-trodden men and improve the condition of our dear motherland". He then left for Patna reaching there in the afternoon of June 4.

After his return to Wardha on June 13, Rajendra Prasad narrated to Gandhiji his efforts to restore communal harmony in Bihar. At this time Walchand Hirachand and Shantikumar Narottam Morarji, Directors of the Scindia Steam Navigation Company, suggested to Gandhiji that Rajendra Prasad should go to Visakhapatnam to lay the foundation stone for their ship-building yard there. On the approval of this idea by Gandhiji and under his advice, Rajendra Prasad performed this task on June 21, 1941. After presenting a survey of the history of the Indian Mercantile Marine, which he prepared on the basis of the material placed at his disposal by the Directors of the Company for this occasion, he observed: "We must continue our struggle for the freedom of the country. Foreign Government and foreign exploitation go hand in hand and we cannot get rid of the latter unless we are free of the former. I congratulate the Scindia Steam Navigation Company on this great step, which they are taking to-day, for establishing once again the ship-building industry of India. I hope in this great enterprise they will secure help and cooperation of all Indians and on their party they will not ignore the claims of the country and specially of those working for them for a just and fair share in their fortune." Continuing Rajendra Prasad said : "No one knows better than you do the handicaps under which you and other Swadeshi concerns have to work. This is going to be no exception unless things change radically. You will be making a great contribution to the building up of an essential national industry under the control, direction and management of Indians, if you succeed. Under the guidance of Walchand Hirachand and his other colleagues and with their great organising talent and drive, a great future awaits this enterprise." The Directors of the Company gave him "innumerable presents" and an amount of money which he donated to some public causes. He was later presented with addresses by the Visakhapatnam Municipality and the District Board, the local Harijan Sevak Sangh and the Congress workers.

Immediately after this, Rajendra Prasad had to start on a peace mission, accompanied by Mathura Prasad and Acharya Kripalani, then General Secretary, All-India Congress Committee, for Dacca, where communal riots had broken out furiously affecting the rural areas and causing loss of many human lives. On the way, he halted on June 22 at Cuttack, where in reply to several questions put to him by some at the local Swaraj Ashram, he emphasised that the Satyagraha was "adequate, sufficient and effective". In a public meeting addressed by him he laid stress on discipline and sacrifice for the success of India's national cause. In the afternoon of June 23, 1941, Rajendra Prasad and Acharya Kripalani discussed the communal situation in the country and other matters at a conference of the Bengal Congress workers in the office of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, Calcutta. On the morning of June 24, Rajendra Prasad met Lady Abala Bose at her residence and discussed with her the prohibition work that was being carried on in the coal-field areas of Bihar under the Sir J. C. Bose Trust Fund. He also presided over a meeting of the Rashtra Bhasha Pracharak Conference, which was then held at Calcutta on June 23 and 24. He pleaded that Hindi was most suitable for being the *lingua franca* of India and at the same time pointed out the need for encouraging the development of all provincial languages and literature for enriching the national language.

On the day Rajendra Prasad reached Dacca, it was all quiet there, though the members of both the communities were still very much agitated on account of the inhuman incidents of murders, loot and arson during the riots regardless of any consideration. He stayed there in the house of Shirish Chandra Chatterjee, an old Congress worker and President of the Dacca Congress Committee. The Muslims of the city invited him to tea at the place of the Nawab of Dacca, where he had long discussions about the measures to be adopted for restoration of communal harmony. He and his party, accompanied by Shirish Chandra Chatterjee, toured the countryside for two or three days and were greatly shocked to see the wide-spread ravages perpetrated by the rioters at different places, particularly loot and arson. In one of the riot-ravaged villages, he saw two men who had come there from Zeradei for employment. People from Bihar worked in various capacities in other parts of the country also. Referring to this, Rajendra Prasad observed that the "adventurous spirit of the uneducated Biharis" was "in sharp contrast to that of the ease-loving, educated Biharis"[4].

The Bengal Government had constituted a committee for enquiry into the Dacca riots and in this connection Jogendra Narayan Majumdar, an old and intimate friend of

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[4] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 521

Rajendra Prasad, had then gone to Dacca to represent the Government and was staying on board a steamer anchored in the Hooghly river. When Rajendra Prasad went to meet him, there was a recrudescence of communal riots in Dacca city with terrible ferocity, even many innocent persons being stabbed to death. Considering it impossible to conduct any enquiry immediately under such abnormal circumstances, Majumdar postponed it and returned to Calcutta with Rajendra Prasad. Rajendra Prasad left for Patna with Acharya Kripalani on June 28. On reaching Patna they issued a joint statement on June 29 in which they referred to their "flying visit" to Dacca and some of the villages in that district "which had been the scene of devastation during the recent communal riots". They mentioned in it that they "found houses of Hindus completely burnt and practically whole quarters and some entire villages inhabited by Hindus utterly gutted" and expressed the view that "what happened in the villages was absolutely one-sided and appeared to be brought about by mendacious propaganda and successfully roused religious frenzy." They regretted that their expectation about "future peace and security" was then belied as, during their stay at Dacca, there was recrudescence of communal trouble. On returning to Calcutta they met Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Fazlul Haque (Chief Minister of Bengal) and Nazimuddin (Home Minister) and had discussions with them.

Rajendra Prasad soon fell ill and remained confined to bed for about two months. After his recovery, he went to Wardha.

The canker of communalism aggravated internal discord, the British Government repeated old promises in sweet language without any suitable response to India's national demands, and the constitutional deadlock was stiffened. The liberal statesmen, including some Muslims, met in a Non-Party Leaders' Conference under the presidentship of Tej Bahadur Sapru, first at Bombay on March 14, 1941, and then at Poona on July 26 and 27 and made some suggestions for securing communal harmony and ending the constitutional deadlock by temporary reconstruction of the Central Government during the war period. But these did not bear fruit. In a statement issued by L. S. Amery, Secretary of State for India, on April 22, 1941, he not only rejected the proposals of the Non-Party Leaders' Conference but also made some reactionary observations, which only added to the resentment of all parties. An Indian District Magistrate of the district of Shahabad in Bihar reported to his Commissioner on May 11, 1941 : "Mr. Amery's speech on India is being condemned by all parties as one indicating total failure of constructive statesmanship". A communique was issued by the Viceroy on July 21, 1941, declaring expansion of his Executive Conucil[5] for "administrative convenience" and establishment of a National Defence Council of thirty members, including, "representatives of Indian States as well as of Provinces and other elements in the national life of British India in its relation to war-efforts." But these fell short of the demands of the Indian National Congress and were condemned by M. A. Jinnah under whose instructions the members of the Muslim League refused to serve on either of these Councils. One new factor intensified discontent of the Indians in different circles and increased their distrust about promises of the British Government regarding grant of independence. The Atlantic Charter, issued in the month of August 1941, to which both the British and the American Governments were committed, contained the following significant provision : "They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of Government under which they will live, and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them." But to the great disappointment of the Indians, Winston Churchill, the British Premier, declared in the House of Commons on September 9, 1941, that the Atlantic Charter was not applicable to India.

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[5] Out of thirteen members of this New Council, including the Commander-in-Chief, eight were Indians

This attitude of the British Government caused deep disappointment in India. The All-India Congress Committee took into full consideration the implications of the new world situation during its meeting at Wardha on January 15 and 16, 1942, and thoroughly discussed the question of India's participation in the war. In a resolution moved by Jawaharlal Nehru it was categorically stated that "only a free and independent India can be in a position to undertake the defence of the country on a national basis and be of help in the furtherance of the larger issues that are emerging from the storm of war". In the course of discussion of this important resolution, Rajendra Prasad made the following statement clarifying the position of those who did not agree with the resolution and remained neutral. "This resolution opens the door, however small the opening may be, for armed help in this war, particularly for the defence of the country and for the larger causes which are emerging out of it, provided that British Government accepts India's demands. Our belief is that arms have not settled any dispute in the world nor are they ever likely to do so in future... We, therefore, consider that the opening that this resolution provides for armed assistance in this war is not in the best interests of the country and we wish that India should not in this war and on the present occasion also in the least relax its hold of the principle of

Ahimsa. We realise at the same time that by merely passing the resolution we are not called upon to take up arms to-day. That can happen only if the British Government makes a declaration in favour of independence of India and transfers the responsibility of administration to our people. There appears to be no chance of that happening to-day. We have not accordingly thought it necessary to resign from the Working Committee. When the British Government opens the way for armed assistance by the Congress, then will be the time for us to make our choice."

CHAPTER XII

THE CABINET MISSION AND 'QUIT INDIA' MOVEMENT

EVENTS were moving with tremendous rapidity, and the international situation had grown extremely ominous since Hitler's invasion of Russia on June 22, 1941, followed by Japan's spectacular success against the Allies in different theatres. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese Air Force made a sudden attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbour and crippled the United States Pacific fleet. On December 10, *The Prince of Wales,* one of the brand new British battleships, and *The Repulse,* an older battle-cruiser, were sunk by Japanese bombers off the coast of Malaya. On February 15, 1942, the strong British naval base at Singapore, considered to be impregnable, surrendered more than 75,000 British and Indian troops falling into the hands of the victorious Japanese. In March 1942, Japan occupied most of Java, Sumatra and other islands of the Dutch East Indies. Japanese troops next invaded Burma, brought Rangoon under their control on March 7 and occupied Mandalay on April 29. Evacuation of Taungu by the British came to be known on April 1 and of Prome on April 3. There was a Japanese air raid on Colombo on April 5, and bombs were dropped on Visakhapatnam and Cocanada next day and a "heavy air-raid smote Trincomalee" on the morning of April 9. Further, Japanese warships were active in the Bay of Bengal and the entire eastern coastline of India lay exposed to their attacks. By the end of May, the Japanese had succeeded in closing the

Burma Road and stopping the passage between China and the outer world.

Thus the war menace had not only affected British interests at strategic positions but was also threatening India at her very doors. In the midst of their "grievous anxieties", the British Government thought it necessary to enlist the support of the Indian people for their interests, as one reason for the failure of their resistance in South-East Asia and Burma was absence of spontaneous support of the subject people. The United States also was trying to persuade Britain to come to a settlement with India. It was under such circumstances that the British Government could not "stand" as Churchill rightly felt, "in a purely negative attitude", and made another proposal in relation to Indian constitutional problem. On March 11, 1942, Churchill had announced that the War Cabinet had taken a unanimous decision regarding Indian policy with a view to rallying "all forces of Indian life to guard their land from the menace of the invader",.and that Sir Strafford Cripps, who had lately joined the Government after working successfully as British Ambassador in Russia during a critical period and had become a member of the War Cabinet, would soon proceed to India to have "direct discussions" with representatives of all parties and communities.

Sir Strafford Cripps reached Delhi on March 23, 1942, with the British Cabinet's proposals, embodied in a Draft Declaration. According to these, the British Government proposed to take steps for the creation of a new Indian Union, having the same status as the other Dominions, the constitution for which was to be drawn up by a body consisting of representatives of both of British India and the Indian States and which was to be set up immediately on the cessation of hostilities. During the war period the British Government were "to bear the responsibility for and retain the control and direction of the defence of India as part of their world war effort", but the Government of India were to organise the various resources of India with the immediate and active participation of the leaders and peoples of India.

Sir Strafford Cripps had meetings and discussions with Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress President, Maulana Azad, and some other leaders, most of whom including Rajendra Prasad remained at Delhi for more than two weeks during the negotiations. The Cripps plan was released to the Press within a few days and it was considered by a meeting of the Congress Working Committee at Delhi. It failed to provide any solution to the constitutional deadlock in India.

The Cripps proposals were rejected by "every single party or group" in India, including some of her moderate statesmen. Gandhiji is reported to have described the pledge about future settlement of the constitution as "a post-dated cheque on a bank that was obviously failing". The Congress Working Committee passed a resolution on April 10, that "though future independence may be implicit in the proposals..... the accompanying provisions and restrictions are such that real freedom may well become an illusion". The principle of non-accession of the Indian Provinces and the States was justly considered to be "a severe blow to the conception of Indian unity". It opened out, remarked Jawaharlal Nehru significantly, a "vista of an indefinite number of partitions both of Provinces and States". The Congress was also opposed to another principle according to which "ninety millions of people in the Indian States" were to have no voice in framing the constitution, as it would mean "a negation of both democracy and self-determination". The proposals relating to the immediate present were also considered to have some serious limitations. The Congress wanted an Indian Defence Member in the National Government, though the Commander-in-Chief would still continue to exercise complete authority over war operations and the armed forces. Its leaders explained to Sir Strafford that "it was not their intention to do anything to upset present arrangements, but what they wanted was, firstly, to make the Indian people feel that the Army was theirs. They wanted to give the national background, the psychological appeal necessary for a popular war". The Congress expressed its anxiety for a National Government which would function with full powers as a Cabinet with the Viceroy acting as constitutional head. But the only change offered was the transformation of the existing Council of the Viceroy by the appointment of additional Indians, which would mean, as Nehru expressed it, that a few of them would "become his liveried camp-followers....... it was inconceivable and impossible for us to accept this position at any time and specially at that time". The Congress President, Maulana Azad, urged the "unanimous demand of Indian people" for "a free National Government" to serve "the cause of India as well as the larger causes for which millions are suffering and dying to-day". Sir Strafford pleaded that the minorities, particularly the Muslims, would not acquiesce in the Congress's suggestion and that it would involve "constitutional changes of a most complicated character and on a very large scale", which would not be effected in war time.

When Sir Strafford Cripps' negotiations with the Indian leaders abruptly broke down on the question of immediate transfer of real power into the hands of Indian Councillors, he started from Delhi for London on April 12, leaving India in a state of excitement and alarm. India was in an extremely embarassing situation. She had become a battleground of rival and foreign troops, her national integrity had been assailed, and her people were bitter and sullen but helpless and inert. England was hopeful about a better turn for them in the war situation from the middle of April, 1942. Referring to this Churchill observed : "We were in no way drawn from our main purposes, and were not deterred from new and vigorous offensive action. It had been a harassing episode, but it was over. From this time on we began to grow stronger"[1]. But this optimism of the British Premier could afford no consolation or relief to the Indians, whose minds were deeply agitated about the problem of security due to the advance of catastrophe and disaster with rapid strides. The British Government had not been able to resist these effectively. Events in South-East Asia and in Burma "had shaken confidence", as was stated in a contemporary report of the Bihar Government, "in British ability to withstand an invasion of India". India was prepared to put forth her best efforts to prevent Japanese occupation of the country provided the British recognised "Indians as equal partners" instead of maintaining their full control on this country as before.

In such desperate moments of wide-spread and acute national discontent, anguish and despair, movements often appear with irresistible forces, defeating the much laboured calculations of statesmen and overpowering all the might of repression on the part of a ruling power. In fact, the logic of events was inexorably driving the country towards a revolution. The much needed psychological background for it was being prepared by Mahatma Gandhi's speeches and writings, marked for sometime, by "a new urgency and passion" and "the hint of action" instead of "symbolic protest". As Rajendra Prasad puts it, they thought that "the best way to meet the danger was to enkindle the flame of freedom and patriotism in the heart of every Indian."[2]

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[1] Churchill, *The Second World War, Vol. IV*, p. 165

To consider this grave situation, the All-India Congress Committee met at Allahabad from April 29 to May 2, 1942. Gandhiji could not be present here, but he sent draft of a resolution through Miraben. There were differences of opinion among the members about this draft and and it was not fully accepted. The Congress passed another resolution, which, however, in substance incorporated the main points of the draft sent by Gandhiji. The resolution held that "India would obtain her freedom through her own strength and would retain it likewise. Not only the interest of India but Britain's safety and world peace and freedom required that Britain must abandon her hold on India. It is on the basis of independence alone that India can deal with Britain or other nations". The resolution "repudiated the idea that freedom could come to India through the intervention of or invasion by a foreign power. In case foreign invasion took place, it must be resisted."

To organise a country-wide national challenge to imperialism, old or new, was considered by the leaders to be the inevitable need of the hour. "It was not to embarrass the British people that our whole scheme was planned", writes Rajendra Prasad, "but to enable the people to resist whoever wanted to dominate India whether it be the British or the Japanese." It is mentioned in a report of the Bihar Government for the period covering the first half of June 1942, that, in a conference held in the Municipal office at Monghyr, Rajendra Prasad advised the Congress workers and others to co-operate with Refugees Relief Committee, to visit the Air Raid Precautions offices, read A.R.P. literature, help in distributing it, join A.R.P. meetings and render other possible assistance to A.R.P. work but, pending further orders, they should not formally enlist themselves as A.R.P. members.

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[2] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 529

From Allahabad, Rajendra Prasad came back to Patna after seeing Gandhiji at Wardha. The onrush of Japanese forces had aggravated confusion and panic throughout Bihar as in other parts of India. Apprehending landings by the Japanese on the coastal regions and to prevent them from making use of landing craft, the Government authorities destroyed or seized the country craft and boats of the rural folk in these areas, particularly in Bengal. They also took possession of the stocks of grains in the villages so that invaders might not utilise these. In fact, life in the rural areas was awfully disturbed. Fear of "scorched earth" policy being followed in India added to the alarm and anxiety of the people.

In their plan to build up a new war front in Bihar from Chhota Nagpur to the Sone area, the Government constructed several roads and air-strips for which they made use of thousands of acres of cultivable lands causing thereby much hardship to the people. Promises made for payment of compensation to those who had been dispossessed of their lands were not fulfilled. Movements of contingents of British and American troops in Chhota Nagpur and North Bihar put much pressure on trains. Further, the use of trains for purposes of defence and for carrying reinforcements and the wounded for treatment from one place to another made communications difficult for the common people. But overpowered by a feeling of insecurity, many were running away with great trouble from the coastal regions to Bihar, U.P. and further north. Some relief was organised for them by constructing new roads and rest houses and by providing food and drinking water. But people in general were panic-striken and bewildered apprehending the approach of doom.

To infuse courage and confidence into the minds of the people and also to explain to them the attitude and programme of the Congress in that hour of grave crisis, Rajendra Prasad toured different parts of Bihar from the last week of April till the end of June, 1942. In view of the bad condition of his health, he limited the number of places to be visited by him and wherever he went he addressed the Congress workers and the public by pointing out to them that a struggle was inevitable with both the imperialist powers, Great Britain and Japan, and that instead of relying on Japan's help to secure independence, they should prepare themselves to ward off the menace of Japanese aggression. He indicated to them that the "agitation would be some sort of Civil Disobedience, a non-violent struggle, but more forceful and intense than any we had so far been engaged in."[3] He appealed to the people and the merchants for help in relieving food and cloth shortage. On May 12 he addressed a public meeting at Chapra exhorting the people to be very particular about these matters and also to carry on constructive work.

The Government had to acquire lands and houses here and there for building aerodromes and military quarters. More lands were levelled for camps and landing grounds. When during Rajendra Prasad's tour at Gaya many local people narrated to him the tales of their miseries due to acquisition of lands, he promised to them that he would request the Government for payment of equitable compensation to them. On returning to Patna, he wrote a letter to the Adviser to the British Government in Bihar to take suitable steps in this matter. He suggested to the Government that on the expiry of the emergency period the acquired lands which were levelled should be restored to the original owners in a condition suitable for cultivation and that a *kisan* should be given compensation by taking into consideration the quantity which his land would have yielded during the period he had been dispossessed of it. As for the lands on which buildings were erected and could not be given back, his suggestion was that the Government should pay the full price of the lands to the *kisans* and also the full value of the buildings which were demolished. The Commissioner of Patna replied to him that Government had agreed with his suggestions. When he visited the district of Manbhum, the Deputy Commissioner of that district also acted according to his suggestions about such problems.

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[3] *Ibid*, p. 532

After completing his tour in Bihar, Rajendra Prasad went to Wardha to attend the meetings of the Congress Working Committee and the All-India Charkha Sangh. The Charkha Sangh's meeting was held for the first time and here decisions were taken for expansion of its activities on a larger scale and for production of more handloom cloth to meet the deficiencies on account of the engagement of most of the mills to produce cloth for the defence forces.

At its meeting at Wardha, the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution on July 14 reiterating the demand for freedom for India, as according to its conviction, "the glow of freedom" was necessary to "make India a willing partner in a joint enterprise (with Great Britain and the Allies) of securing freedom of the nations and peoples of the world and in the trials and tribulations which accompany it". It was mentioned in the resolution that the Congress would "take no hasty step and would like to avoid, in so far as is possible, any course of action that might embarrass the United Nations", but if its appeal failed then the Congress would be compelled to launch a wide-spread struggle under the leadership of Mahatma

Gandhi. In the meeting of the Working Committee at Wardha some opposed the proposal to start the Satyagraha movement and the final decision was deferred till the meeting of the Congress at Bombay early in August. When Rajendra Prasad met Gandhiji before leaving Wardha, he found that some had gathered round him and were discussing whether dismantling railway lines and cutting telegraph wires would be regarded as compatible with the creed of non-violence. Rajendra Prasad told Gandhiji that such questions had been raised by some in 1930 and requested him for clear instructions about these in the programme to be formulated by him. There was an informal and casual discussion about this matter and those present interpreted Gandhiji's views "to mean that the violence or non-violence of an act would be determined by the fact whether it endangered anyone's life and the doer acknowledged full responsibility for his act so that others did not suffer for it."[4] But the actual programme had not been drawn up then; this was to be done at the Bombay meeting of the Congress.

While returning to Patna, Rajendra Prasad got down at Gondia and addressed a meeting there. He also halted at Banaras where a meeting of the Bharatiya Itihas Parishad was held.

Rajendra Prasad then went to Tarapur in the Monghyr district to attend a Kisan Conference on July 18 and 19 which was inaugurated by Acharya Kripalani. Shrikrishna Sinha, Anugraha Narayan Sinha, Krishna Ballabh Sahay and some other prominent leaders of the Province also attended it.

To acquaint the people of Bihar with the contents and significance of the Wardha resolution and to ascertain their views on it, Rajendra Prasad, though indisposed, convened meetings of the Bihar Provincial Congress Working Committee on July 21 and 22 and all present there expressed their approval of the said resolution. An emergent meeting of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee was held on July 31, where Rajendra Prasad explained the nature and significance of the contemplated movement. As a matter of fact, the psychological background for it was already prepared before the Bombay meeting of the Congress. One or two days after the meeting of the Provincial Congress Committee, the Bihar members of the All-India Congress Committee started for Bombay, but Rajendra Prasad could not do so due to his illness.

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[4] *Ibid*, p. 536

Conscious of the inevitability of the movement and also on hearing rumours that the Government was planning to arrest the leaders even before it could be started and that at Patna the old camp jail, not in use for sometime, was being made ready for accommodation of the political prisoners, Rajendra Prasad decided to frame a programme of action atleast for Bihar. Discussing this matter with some of his co-workers', who were then at Patna, he gave detailed suggestions for it to Deep Narayan Singh, then Secretary of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, and Mathura Prasad, and requested them to write out a draft programme. After they had completed the draft in consultation with Anugraha Narayan Sinha, who also had not gone to Bombay, Rajendra Prasad went through it and it was finalised with certain amendments. It was given to Sakhi Chand Jaiswal for printing with instructions that it should be kept secret so long as Rajendra Prasad or anyone authorised by him did not permit publication and propaganda. It was formulated with the idea that if all the leaders were arrested, the people would act according to it. Gandhiji's emphasis on utmost efforts for attainment of freedom by not discarding non-violence was reaffirmed here. A plan of Satyagraha, fundamentally similar to the earlier Satyagrahas but more intense than these, was chalked out.

Soon a report was received at Patna from Delhi that the Government would not arrest the leaders on August 8 or earlier but would watch the course of events before taking the final step. On behalf of the Congress it was said that Gandhiji would have talks with the Viceroy and the movement would be launched if these failed. So Rajendra Prasad thought they could wait till August 11, that is the expected date for the return of the Bihar delegates from Bombay. Anugraha Narayan Sinha went to Rae Bareli to see his ailing brother there and Deep Narayan Singh went to Muzaffarpur to fulfil some engagements. Rajendra Prasad remained at the Sadaqat Ashram, with Mathura Prasad and Chakradhar Saran.

Soon there was a crucial turn in the course of events. The Congress Working Committee met at Bombay on August 5 and passed what has been popularly called the 'Quit India' resolution. In its historic session at Bombay on August 7 and 8, the All-India Congress Committee endorsed it by a large majority and expressed the opinion that "events subsequent to it have given it further justification. and have made it clear that the immediate ending of British rule in India is an urgent necessity, both for the sake of India and for the sake of the United Nations." The Committee further resolved "to sanction for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale" under the leadership of Gandhiji. Addressing the Congress on this occasion Gandhiji observed : "Freedom should be your *mantra* and you should chant it." He mentioned in his speech that before launching the movement he would address the Viceroy and wait for his reply. But this desire of Gandhiji remained unfulfilled.

Early on the morning of August 9, Gandhiji and other members of the Congress Working Committee were arrested. Immediately Rajendra Prasad heard the radio announcement about these arrests. His turn also was not long in coming. That morning when he was reading the Bombay news in *The Searchlight,* W. G. Archer, District Magistrate of Patna, accompanied by the Civil Surgeon, Major Muddock, came to the Sadaqat Ashram and inquired of his health and programme. Major Muddock had been brought there to give his opinion if Rajendra Prasad could be shifted to a distant place in the bad condition of his health at that time. In the opinion of the Civil Surgeon this was not possible. So he was taken to Bankipur jail at about 12.30 p.m. profusely garlanded amidst shouts of *'Quit India', 'Gandhiji-ki-Jai', 'Rajen Babu-ki-Jai'.* Mathura Prasad and Chakradhar Saran left the jail after making some arrangements there for Rajendra Prasad's comfort. Phulan Prasad Varma was also brought there under arrest within a few minutes and Mathura Prasad entered the jail at 5.30 P.M. that day. Immediately after Rajendra Prasad's arrest many students of Patna led a large procession from near the B. N. College to the Patna University compound where they held a meeting. Some delivered speeches supporting Congress policy and programme, condemning the Government's action in arresting Rajendra Prasad and appealing to the students in general to join freedom's battle. A resolution was passed to organise strikes in colleges and schools. The students marched in a procession along the lower road, made a demonstration for about fifteen minutes before the Bankipur Jail and then moved in front of the Government House where also they held a meeting and condemned the Government's repressive policy. After this, they dispersed peacefully.

Shrikrishna Sinha was arrested at Patna on August 10, Anugraha Narayan Sinha was arrested on August 11 and Satya Narayan Sinha, General Secretary, Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, and Mahamaya Prasad, President, Saran District Congress Committee, were arrested at the Patna Junction Railway Station on the morning of August 12 on their return from Bombay. Many others were arrested within a few days. Several Ordinances were immediately issued by the Government, and Congress offices and organisations were declared unlawful. On August 10, the police seized the Sadaqat Ashram, the District Congress office at New Kadamkuan, the Kisan Sabha Office at Kadamkuan, and the Congress Socialist Party office at New Kadamkuan.

But the movement soon developed into an unprecedented mass upheaval as a gigantic challenge to alien domination. Within a day or two the following programme of activities was made known to the people in Circular No. 1 of the Bihar Congress Committee, Patna :

After the arrest of Gandhiji and the other leaders hartal was to be observed for one whole day by all sections of the people; Congress workers were to move from village to village to convey to the people the instructions of Gandhiji and the other leaders; meetings were to be held and processions were to be organised in every town and village even in defiance of any ban put on these by Government; *vakils* and *mukhtars* were to give up their practice in the courts and the students were to leave the colleges and schools to join the movement; the police were requested not to fire on those who would participate in the war of independence or to disperse them with lathi charges; the people were not to pay *chaukidari* and union taxes;

chaukidars, dafadars, policemen and Government servants of other categories, railway staff, employees on steamers, in post offices, coal mines and factories were to resign their posts; village panchayats were to be formed for helping the people; arrangements were to be made for regular supply of information regarding the movement; and the National Flag was to be hoisted on Government buildings.

With patriotism as the most indomitable passion of their soul, the students played a heroic role in this great revolution for the country's freedom and seven of them earned martyrdom at the altar of liberty as a result of police firing in front of the Secretariat gate at Patna on the afternoon of August 11, 1942, which is justly reckoned as a memorable day in the history of Bihar's struggle for independence. This accelerated the speed of the movement which spread like a mighty conflagration seeking to consume all that stood for or helped foreign authority. In fact, it henceforth took a violent turn. The rapidity with which the movement spread and the undaunted response of the masses to it, "went", observed a Bihar Government officer in a report, "beyond the imagination of the authorities". There were furious outbursts of popular indignation, railway lines were dislocated, telephone and telegraph wires were cut and obstructions of various kinds were placed on the roads.

To terrorise the people, the Government unleashed a veritable reign of terror, making indiscriminate arrests, merciless assaults, loot, arson, exaction of collective fines and brutal atrocities on the part of the military who sometimes defied words of caution of the civil authorities. By October-November 1942, the movement became less intense. Addressing the House of Commons on October 8, 1942, Amery observed : "Enough to say that the firmness of Government, loyally supported by the civil services, police and, whenever it became necessary, the army, has broken the back of the movement which even if it was prevented from perfecting its preparations, was still very formidable....... It would be rash to say that we are yet out of the woods. Sporadic disturbances are still reported daily. The forces of law and order will, for months to come, have to be unceasingly vigilant and we need all the support that the Government of India and this House can give." In fact, the movement had not completely collapsed by that time. Unmitigated repression on the part of the Government drove discontent underground and many of our nationalists worked in secrecy with the aim of removing British authority and the various maladies for which it was responsible. Jayaprakash Narayan played the most remarkable role in this phase of the revolution.

Rajendra Prasad remained in the Bankipur jail. He could not be sent to the Hazaribagh jail on the ground of ill-health. The idea of transferring him to Ahmednagar Fort, where the other members of the Congress Working Committee had been kept, did not materialise. In the jail he got expert medical advice from Dr. T. N. Banerjee, Principal of the Patna Medical College, who often visited him there and sometimes with Dr. Raghunath Saran and Dr. Damodar Prasad, all of whom were his old physicians. He had nothing to complain about the arrangements made by Government for his treatment and comfort. They permitted Mathura Prasad and Chakradhar Saran to stay with him from the beginning and later Balmiki Chowdhry also was permitted to join him.

A few days after the arrest of Rajendra Prasad, the Patna newspapers stopped publication. But the Bihar Government began to bring out a daily called the *Patna Times* which could be read in jail. Through it and other sources some information about the repressive measures of the Government was received by Rajendra Prasad. The news of Gandhiji's "epic fast" from February 10 to March 2, 1943, at the age of seventy-three as a moral protest against excesses on the part of the Government, caused intense agony in the minds of the people and greatly perturbed Rajendra Prasad who tried to keep himself informed about it as quickly as possible. He felt greatly relieved on hearing that the period of Gandhiji's fast had been safely over. Another incident which produced much agony in the mind of Rajendra Prasad during his stay in the jail was the terrible Bengal famine of 1943 which besides causing unspeakable hardships to the people of the Province, took a heavy toll of human lives. Gruesome details of this horrible calamity, which he read in the newspapers, moved him deeply. "I continued reading the papers", he writes, "until one day I could have no more of it and threw aside the paper. I stopped reading the papers for some time; I could not bear the horror dished out from day to day. I was angry because I was helpless."[6]

In October 1943, Chakradhar Saran was sent to Hazaribagh jail and Mathura Prasad was released on the recommendation of an official committee which, according to a new ordinance, was visiting the jails to review the cases of the detenus. Balmiki Chowdhry remained with Rajendra Prasad till December 1944. When the Committee visited Bankipur jail, its members asked Rajendra Prasad if he wanted to be released. He firmly replied, "Not, unless and until all the others were released". In jail Rajendra Prasad devoted his time to writing. After an exhaustive study of the relevant published literature regarding the demand for Pakistan, he prepared a manuscript on this subject to make his views known to the public, particularly the Muslims. He was told by the Commissioner of Police, who visited him one day in the jail, that Government could permit him to publish the work after going through it. He replied that he could present it to the Government if he was given facility for typing. At his request Michael John, a Congressman and labour leader of Jamshedpur, was brought to Bankipur jail for typing this work and he finished it by June 14, 1945. Chakradhar Saran and Mathura Prasad helped him in revising the manuscript. It was first published as a book, under the title of *India Divided*, by Hind Kitabs Limited in January 1946. Rajendra Prasad had started writing his autobiography while he had gone to Sikar in Rajasthan for rest in 1940. At the request of some of his friends, he continued with it further now in jail up to the period of the Ramgarh Congress, and the rest he completed at Pilani after his release. It appeared in print first in Hindi; subsequently an English version of it was also published. It is a valuable source book for the history of Indian nationalism.

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[6] *Ibid*, p. 554

Rajendra Prasad thus records experiences of his jail life at Bankipur : "Prison life is bound to be irksome in so far as it deprives one of freedom, but I should say I did not, after all, have a bad time in Bankipur jail. I adjusted myself to my surroundings soon and to the routine I had been accustomed to while I was in Hazaribagh jail years earlier. The arrival of new prisoners was always a cause of excitement since they brought fresh news. Sometime later we began getting newspapers but we were not carried away by the reports of what was happening in the country. When the flow of fresh prisoners ceased, I began devoting my time to spinning, reading and writing. My health, of course, was not good, though I was not always confined to bed. Members of my family used to visit me often, almost always accompanied by my grandchildren. They were joyous moments when I used to spend a half-hour playing with the children. Arun, my two-and-a-half-year old grandson, became so used to the place that as soon as he arrived, he would run from the jail gates to the hospital ward where I was kept. I used to give him and my grand-daughters the sweets they usually demanded but he would go away disappointed when I said I could not go back with him as he desired"[7]

During the period Rajendra Prasad was in jail for the last term, many of his friends and national workers had passed away. Some among them, who were the Tana Bhagats of Ranchi, died in jail. Vaidyaraj Braj Behari Chaube, the most eminent Ayurvedic physician of Bihar, who often attended on Rajendra Prasad, Sir Ganesh Dutta Singh with whom he had been intimate even before he became Minister of Bihar in 1921, and Nirsu Narayan Sinha, a prominent citizen of Patna and friend of Rajendra Prasad, also passed away. Ram Dayalu Sinha, one of the foremost leaders of the national movement in Bihar, and companion of Rajendra Prasad since his school days, died a few months after his release. Rajendra Prasad lost his niece, the first child of his brother, very much attached to him. Outside Bihar some noble personalities died in jails. They were Mahadev Desai, who had been with Gandhiji in the Aga Khan's palace at Poona, Gandhiji's wife Kasturba, who has been justly described by Rajendra Prasad "as an ideal Hindu woman, a symbol of Indian culture and the very embodiment of affection"[8], and Maulana Azad's wife.

There was an outbreak of malaria in epidemic form in Bihar in 1944-45 and many people died there. Shrikrishna Sinha and Anugraha Narayan Sinha, who had been released by that time, did relief work and constituted a committee for it with Dr. T. N Banerjee as President.

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[7] *Ibid*, p. 543

[8] *Ibid*, p. 562

Rajendra Prasad helped this committee in relief work by supplying it with funds. The balance left out of the Earthquake Relief Fund was utilised for sometime in relieving distress due to natural calamities. Later on, a large part of it was given to the Charkha Sangh. During the movement of 1942, this fund was frozen by the Government. At the request of Rajendra Prasad, the Government released it in September 1944, and it was utilised by him for relief work.

On December 11, 1944, Rajendra Prasad requested the Bihar Government to make suitable arrangements for proper preservation and protection of furniture and other articles of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee and of the Bihar Vidyapith in the Sadaqat Ashram, which had been seized by it in August 1942. As regards his personal property and papers, he suggested that these might be released and made over either to his Secretary, Chakradhar Saran, or to his son, Mrityunjay Prasad. This request had assumed urgency as some papers relating to his medical treatment were badly needed. The Government passed order for returning the personal property and papers of Rajendra Prasad to his nominee and asked the District Magistrate of Patna to see that furniture, records, etc., of the Congress buildings were not damaged.

The war had taken a favourable turn for the Allies when Lord Wavell came to India in mid-October, 1943, as Governor-General. But there were still ominous clouds on the eastern horizon. While the constitutional problem in India had remained unsolved, communal differences had widened and with the Congress demand of "Quit India" was matched the Muslim League's new slogan of "Divide and Quit". Rajagopalachari's formula for solution of the constitutional deadlock and communal discord, as proposed by him in his pamphlet entitled *The Way Out,* published in November, 1943, had produced no effect whatsoever. Gandhiji's negotiations with Jinnah did not prove fruitful. Jinnah stiffened his attitude and observed in March 1945 : "Pakistan is our irrevocable and unalterable national demand...... We shall never accept any constitution on the basis of a United India."

There had been pressing demands from all quarters for release of political prisoners and ending of the constitutional deadlock. In his Presidential Address at the third meeting of the Non-Party Leaders' Conference held at Lucknow on April 7, 1944, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru observed : "That there is deep resentment and a keen sense of frustration at large, I have not the least doubt. It is unwise in the abiding interest of India and England to allow the present state of things to continue in the Provinces any longer." By the end of March 1945, the Non-Party Conference Conciliation Committee, working under the guidance of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, pleaded for immediate formation of a Central Executive Council consisting of Indians except the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief and restoration of responsible Government in the 'Section 93' Provinces with Coalition Ministries of major parties as far as possible. But these suggestions were not acceptable to Jinnah, nor did he agree to a scheme formulated by Bhulabhai Desai, then leader of the Congress Party in the Central Assembly, in consultation with Liaquat Ali Khan, then Deputy Leader of the Muslim League. This scheme recommended an Indianized Council, 40 per cent of the seats being for the Congress, 40 per cent for the Muslim League and 20 percent for the other minority parties.

In a broadcast speech from Delhi on June 14, 1945, the Viceroy announced that orders had been passed for the release of the members of the Congress Working Committee. So, Rajendra Prasad was released early next morning amidst demonstration of profound joy by the people. In his broadcast, the Viceroy explained some new proposals of the British Government to "ease the political situation". He issued invitations to twenty-two leaders to attend a conference at Simla for this purpose on June 25.

To consider the Wavell Plan, the Congress Working Committee met at Bombay on June 21 and 22, and in the midst of its discussions Gandhiji and Maulana Azad, Congress President, got invitations from the Viceroy to proceed immediately to Simla. The Congress decided to participate in the Simla Conference. When Gandhiji and Maulana Azad started for Simla, Rajendra Prasad left for Patna. But two days later he received a telegram for going to Simla to attend a meeting of the Congress Working Committee, held from July 3. After adjournment for about a fortnight, the Simla Conference met again on July 14. The Wavell Plan for an interim arrangement suggested reconstitution of the Central Executive Council in such a way that all its members, except the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief, should be "leaders of Indian political life", there being "a balanced representation of the main communities, including equal proportions of Moslems and Caste Hindus". The Congress in a way agreed to the proposals of Lord Wavell and even sent a list of names for members of the proposed Central Executive Council. Rajendra Prasad was not happy at the exclusion of the name of a prominent personality like Bhulabhai Desai from this list. As for himself he was persuaded by Gandhiji to accept the decision of the Working Committee to include his name in it. Jinnah did not agree to the composition of the Central Executive Council and described the Wavell Plan as "a snare". So there was no settlement about the interim arrangement and the Simla Conference ended in failure.

Rajendra Prasad soon started collection of funds for supplying aid to those national workers, who had suffered immensely during the movement of 1942-43, and also to those families, some of whose members had lost their lives in fighting for the country's freedom. One day during his stay at Pilani, he incidentally referred to his desire in this respect to S. D. Pande, Principal of the Birla College, without asking for any collection. The Principal, however, on his own initiative called a meeting of the teachers and students of his college on August 9, 1945, and requested Rajendra Prasad to address it. The teachers and students of the college presented him with a purse of Rs. 1,000. At the invitation of the people of Suryagarh and Fatehgarh in Rajasthan, he visited those places and returned to Pilani with Rs. 16,000.

After attending a meeting of the Congress Working Committee at Poona and arranging for the publication of his book *India Divided* in Bombay, Rajendra Prasad returned to Patna. He thought of going to Zeradei after a lapse of four years with a view to taking rest for ten days. When during his journey to that place he alighted at the Paleza steamer *ghat*, a large number of men including the workers at the Paleza Ghat offered him a rousing reception and gave him their contribution for the political sufferers' relief fund. At Zeradei also, the villagers organised a grand reception and presented a purse to him. During his stay there, many narrated him their tales of woe caused by official repression. At his invitation, Dwarka Prasad Mishra of Jabalpur met him there and recited before him verses from his book *Krishnayan*, in which he had narrated the life story of Lord Krishna on the pattern of Tulsidas' *Ramayana*.

This was followed by Rajendra Prasad's six-week tour of Bihar during which he collected Rs. 5 lakh. So, he abandoned the idea of visiting cities like Bombay and Calcutta for this purpose. But he had an attack of pneumonia at Katihar. Dr. T. N. Banerjee went there to treat him. As there was some improvement in his condition, he was brought to Patna by special train.

Rajendra Prasad wanted to expedite the publication of the volumes which had been prepared under the auspices of the Bharatiya Itihas Parishad and even paid a flying visit to Calcutta to discuss matters relating to it with Dr. Jadunath Sarkar and Dr. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar. But for certain reasons his desire was not fulfilled.

CHAPTER XIII

ELECTIONS AND FORMATION OF INTERIM GOVERNMENT

IN September 1945, the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress and the All-India Congress Committee met at Poona and Bombay, respectively, to take stock of the prevailing political situation and to consider the future course of action. The Congress decided to contest the elections "if for nothing else than to demonstrate the revolutionary will of the people of India and to utilize the elections for furthering the struggle for the independence of India"[1]. For necessary work in this connection, the Congress constituted a Central Election Committee consisting of Abul Kalam Azad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Govind Ballabh Pant, Asaf Ali, Pattabhi Sitaramayya and Shankarao Deo. In Bihar, Rajendra Prasad and other national leaders of the Province undertook tours in different parts for election purposes. On October 3, 1945, Rajendra Prasad observed in an interview in Calcutta that the Congress would "contest those seats which it thought it could win, both in the Muslim and non-Muslim constituencies"[2]. He further said in another interview in Calcutta on October 5 : "Quit India means Quit Asia; if India comes out of Empire, no other part of Asia can remain under any European power for any length of time". In the same month, he toured the Saran district and Chhota

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[1] *Indian National Congress Report of the General Secretaries, March—October 1946*, p. 67

[2] *The Indian Annual Register, 1945, Vol. II*, p. 19

Nagpur Division and he moved in the Bhagalpur Division in the next month.

In the elections to the Central Assembly in 1945, the Congress got most of the non-Muslim seats and the Muslim seats were generally captured by the Muslim League. In Bihar as a result of the election, the final position of parties in the lower house of 152 seats was as follows : Congress 98, Muslim League 34, Momins 5, Adivasis 3, Independent 12. So in March 1946, the Governor of Bihar requested Shrikrishna Sinha, leader of the Congress Party, to form a ministry. A ministry was formed with Shrikrishna Sinha as Chief Minister, Anugraha Narayan Sinha and Syed Mahmud. Jaglal Chowdhry, who had been sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, was released and became the fourth Minister. A few days later, the Council of Ministers was expanded with the addition of five more members, Ram Charitra Singh, Badri Nath Varma, Krishna Ballabh Sahay, Binoda Nand Jha and Abdul Qaiyum Ansari.

As in the past Rajendra Prasad now took keen interest in socio-economic matters of national importance according to the views of Gandhiji. Gandhiji started *goshalas* at the Sabarmati Ashram as well as at the Sevagram Ashram. In the neighbourhood of Wardha, Radhakrishna Bajaj had been running a long-established *goshala*. Rajendra Prasad used to visit these *goshalas* occasionally. In 1946 at the request of Radhakrishna Bajaj and Janaki Devi Bajaj, he presided over the Cow Protection Conference at Wardha. Encouraged by what he then saw at Wardha, he organised and presided over a similar conference at Patna in consultation with *goshala* workers at Darbhanga. This conference was attended by Janaki Devi Bajaj as a distinguished visitor, by representatives of all *goshalas* in Bihar, besides Datar Singh, Hardev Sahai, Syed Rahimtullah Kazi, Nazir Ahmed Sherwani and cattle specialists of the Bihar Government. "I did not take interest in the subject", observed Rajendra Prasad, "because of its religious aspect but because the *goshala* institution was necessary for our peculiar rural economy. ......I explained the importance of the cow in the economy of a predominantly agricultural country and showed how, because of our blind faith and ignorance, we were damaging rather than helping the cause of cow uplift and antagonising others instead of enlisting their support."[3] After this conference a federation of *goshalas* was organised with a registered office at Sadaqat Ashram, Patna, where a 'model' *goshala* was started.

Quickly changing circumstances in India and abroad expedited the end of the constitutional deadlock in India. Britain had before her the complicated legacies of the second global war, and in India the urge for national independence had become more irresistible than before. The new Labour Government in England, which had come into office on August 5, with Attlee as Prime Minister, realised the gravity of the situation. Attlee observed in the House of Commons on February 15, 1946: "The temperature of 1946 is not the temperature of 1920, 1930 or even 1942. ....I am quite certain that at the present time the idea of nationalism is running very fast in India and, indeed, all over Asia". Already on February 19, 1946, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, had announced the decision of the British Cabinet that a Cabinet Mission, consisting of himself, Sir Strafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade, and A. V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty, would soon visit India to hold discussions with the leaders of Indian public life regarding the future constitution of India with a view to eventual transfer of power to Indian hands on the lines already laid down by the Viceroy in September 1945. The three members of the Cabinet Mission reached India on March, 23 1946. They had a series of discussions with different political parties and met four representatives each of the Congress and the Muslim League at Simla from May 5. But the negotiations failed to bring about agreement about the formation of an interim Government and the machinery of constitution making.

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[3] *Autobiography of Rajendra Prasad*, p. 579

On the breaking-up of the Simla Tripartite Conference by May 12, the Cabinet Mission released their plan on May 16, 1946. The Mission rightly held that, in consideration of the geographical and strategical implications and the numerical strength of the Muslims and the other communities in the respective areas "neither a larger nor a smaller sovereign State of Pakistan would provide an acceptable solution for the communal problem."

It further recommended that :

"(1) There should be a Union of India, embracing both British India and the States, which should deal with the following subjects : Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Communications; and should have the powers necessary to raise the finances required for the above subjects.

(2) The Union should have an Executive and a Legislature constituted from British India and States' representatives. Any question raising a major communal issue in the Legislature should require for its decision a majority of the representatives present and voting of each of the two major communities as well as a majority of all the members present and voting.

(3) All subjects other than the Union subjects, and all residuary powers, should vest in the Provinces.

(4) The States should retain all subjects and powers other than those ceded to the Union.

(5) The Provinces should be free to form Groups with

Executives and Legislatures, and each Group would determine the Provincial subjects to be taken in common.

(6) The constitution of the Union and of the Groups should contain a provision whereby any Province could, by a majority vote of its Legislative Assembly, call for a reconsideration of the terms of the constitution after an initial period of ten years and ten-yearly intervals thereafter."

For the convening of a body to frame the new constitution, the Mission recommended a scheme which would "(a) allot to each Province a total number of seats proportional to its population, roughly in the ratio of one to a million, as the nearest substitute for representation by adult suffrage; (b) divide this provincial allocation of seats among the main communities (General, Muslim and Sikh, as the Mission noted) in each Province in proportion to their population; (c) provide that the representatives allotted to each community in a Province shall be elected by the members of that community in its Legislative Assembly."

Each part (General, Muslim, Sikh) of the Legislative Assembly in each Province was to elect its own representatives by the method of proportional representation with a single transferable vote. The constitution-making body composed of representatives from the different units would be divided into three sections corresponding to three groups, A, B, C. Each Section would "settle" the constitutions for the Provinces included in it and would also decide "whether any Group-Constitution shall be set up for these Provinces and, if so, with what provincial subjects the Group should deal". The three Sections and the representatives of the Indian States were to meet for the purpose of settling the Union Constitution.

The Cabinet Mission Plan was not considered to be wholly satisfactory by any section of the Indian population. But the Muslim League accepted it "in as much as the basis and the foundations of Pakistan are inherent in the Mission's Plan, by virtue of the compulsory grouping of the six Muslim Provinces in Sections B and C." The Congress accepted the Cabinet Mission's long term proposals for the convening of a Constituent Assembly to frame the constitution of "a free, united and democratic" India, but it rejected the proposal of the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy for an interim government contained in a statement of June 16. So, the Viceroy announced on June 29 the formation of a care-taker Government of seven members and the Cabinet Mission left for England. As a member of the Congress Working Committee and one of the most prominent national leaders of our country, Rajendra Prasad had an important role in carrying on the negotiations referred to above and in guiding the policy of the Congress during this significant period.

In the elections to the Constituent Assembly, held in the month of July 1946, the Congress members were returned in an overwhelming majority. Jinnah characterised it as "brute majority". The Muslim League Council decided on July 29 to reverse its earlier stand by rejecting both the May 16 and June 16 proposals and "to resort to direct action to achieve Pakistan". Communal frenzy rose to fever pitch and as a result of it on August 16, the date of Muslim League's 'direct action', the city of Calcutta was the scene of an "appalling carnage" and loss of human lives, which *The Statesman* characterised as "the Great Calcutta Killing".

Meanwhile, the Congress had at a meeting at Wardha passed a resolution in favour of accepting the proposals of June 16 for an Interim Government. The Viceroy also decided to form an Interim Government without the Muslim League as it had withdrawn its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's plan and invited Nehru, President of the

Congress, on August 12 "to make proposals for the immediate formation of an Interim Government". Nehru still made a fruitless attempt to secure Jinnah's cooperation in forming "as representative a Government as possible". After an interview with the Viceroy, Nehru convened a meeting of the Parliamentary Committee at Delhi to advise on the composition of the Cabinet. Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad and Rajendra Prasad were members of this Committee. After the list of names for the proposed Cabinet was finalised, Rajendra Prasad went to Pilani where he wanted to stay for rest till the end of August. But when the Congress Working Committee met at Delhi on August 27, he returned there from Pilani to participate in its deliberations.

The new Interim Government took office on September 2, 1946. Its twelve Ministers were Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Sarat Chandra Bose, C. Rajagopalachari, Asaf Ali, John Matthai, Jagjivan Ram, Shafaat Ahmad Khan, Baldev Singh, C. H. Bhabha and Ali Zaheer. Rajendra Prasad received the portfolio of Agriculture and Food. On September 7, Rajendra Prasad tendered his resignation from the Presidentship of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee.

After some negotiations between the Viceroy and Jinnah, five Muslim League nominees joined the Interim Government on October 26, 1946. They were Liaquat Ali Khan, Raja Ghazanafar Ali Khan, Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar, I. I. Chundrigar and Jogendra Nath Mandal, a Scheduled Caste Minister of Bengal. But the Cabinet could not work as a team. The League members attended the Cabinet meetings only when the Viceroy called a meeting of the Cabinet. This attitude of the Muslim League tended to make the new Government "bipartisan rather than a real coalition".

There were various complicated problems in the country and a regrettable deterioration in the communal situation. Following the unprecedented Calcutta riots, there were communal clashes here and there causing dreadful and lamentable outrages which spared neither sex nor age. The Hindu population of Dacca, Noakhali and Tipperah was subjected to inhuman tortures and atrocities at the hands of League fanatics. This had violent repercussions in Bihar, causing from the end of October wide-spread communal disturbances in which the Muslims suffered terribly. On hearing of the Bihar tragedies, Nehru came to Patna on November 3, with Sardar Patel, Laiquat Ali Khan and Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar. Rajendra Prasad also rushed here on November 5 with Acharya Kripalani. He announced at a Press Conference at Patna that Mahatma Gandhi had resolved to fast unto death if communal riots in Bihar did not stop within twenty-four hours. By touring indefatigably the riot-affected areas, Nehru and Rajendra Prasad tried their best to bring the disturbed situation under control. Both of them addressed a largely attended public meeting at the Patna *Maidan* and Rajendra Prasad observed before the audience : "Humanity demands that this mad orgy of loot, arson and murder must be stopped immediately even at the cost of great sacrifice, if necessary."

As Minister for Agriculture and Food, Rajendra Prasad had an uphill task before him. Besides the general dislocation in the economy of the country caused by World War II, there was acute food shortage in India due to poor rains and insufficient production of both rice and *rabi* crops. Previously to meet food shortage in the deficit areas of India, the Government used to import rice from Burma. But that was stopped during the war. Apprehending food shortage in 1946, the Government arranged to import foodgrains from overseas. But in view of acute food shortage at that time throughout the world, an international organisation was set up to collect foodgrains from the surplus areas and to send them to the deficit countries. India became a member of this organisation. Herbert Hoover Sr., a former President of the United States, then in charge of UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency), visited India. Moved at India's distress, he recommended help to her. An American non-official delegation headed by Shultz, a specialist in matters relating to food and agriculture, also came to India and expressed concern at India's critical food situation. So the international organisation sent foodgrains to India but the quantity was not adequate to meet her needs. as the said organisation had to supply foodgrains to other deficit areas also.

In a broadcast on September 23, 1946, Rajendra Prasad dwelt on the grave food crisis in India and indicated what efforts should be made to meet it. The main points in his food policy were :

(1) Gradual curtailment of Government commitments by withdrawing rationing in the reverse order to the original process of extensions.

(2) Reduction of dependence on imports and greater emphasis on internal procurement.

(3) Greater freedom to Provinces with regard to prices to be paid for procurement, consistently in keeping them within reasonable limits for the customer.

(4) To watch developments and keep in readiness a reserve of foodgrains to meet emergencies.

Rajendra Prasad had a firm conviction that India being mainly an agricultural country should be self-sufficient in respect of food. As her population was increasing rapidly and the food available was neither adequate in quantity nor balanced in nature, he recommended an increase in the production of milk, fish, meat, fat, oils, fruits and vegetables.

He encouraged agricultural research in all possible ways. While addressing the 16th meeting of the Governing Body of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research on September 25, 1946, he observed : "Agriculture and food should have the highest consideration and agricultural research, which places in our hands the means of increasing the food supply of the country, should have the highest priority and no amount of attention given to this advancement can be too great." The name of the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research was changed into Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

Rajendra Prasad paid much attention to the problem of animal husbandry which had special importance in a country like India where a large portion of her people did not eat meat or any other animal products, but took milk and milk products. Under his advice, several measures were adopted by his Department for improvement of the breed of cattle, and their proper feeding and care, so that they could be utilised in a better way for agriculture and for producing milk.

Steps were taken for proper utilisation of fertilizers and manures in the urban as well as rural areas. Definite schemes in this respect were prepared at an All-India Conference of Composts and circulated to the different Provincial Governments for implementation.

By virtue of his own qualities, Rajendra Prasad secured the active cooperation of the officers and others of his Department and also of the people in carrying out his food policy successfully during about 16 months when he held the portfolio of Agriculture and Food, and was able to tide over the acute crisis to a large extent, so that during the critical period not a single person had died of starvation. With his characteristic modesty, he remarked, "If they have succeeded in resolving the crisis even in a limited measure, the credit entirely goes to those who have co-operated with me in the task, and if any mistakes have been made, the fault is mine."

When the 54th session of the Indian Congress Committee met at Meerut on November 23 and 24, 1946, under the Presidentship of Acharya J. B. Kripalani, Rajendra Prasad moved the resolution on the prevailing communal disturbances in the country and urged that it was the "duty of every Congressman to stop them and to carry the message of harmony to the farthest corner". The Congresss then passed a resolution, declaring that India should be a Sovereign Democratic Republic.

At this time Bihar suffered a great loss in the death of Braj Kishore Prasad, one of its veteran patriots whom Gandhiji had described as "the soul of public life in Bihar" and with whom Rajendra Prasad had long and intimate relations. Rajendra Prasad had also two bereavements in his family—one in the death of the wife of his eldest son, Mrityunjay Prasad, and the other in the death of a son of Janardan Prasad, his second son. These moved him much. But still he soon responded to the call of public duty.

CHAPTER XIV

FIRST PRESIDENT OF INDIA

THE first session of the Indian Constituent Assembly was inaugurated at New Delhi on December 9, 1946. Representatives of all Provinces and communities participated in its work. But the elected Muslim League members remained absent from it. To conduct its proceedings till a permanent Chairman was elected, Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha, an eminent Indian statesman and oldest member of the House, was elected its temporary Chairman. On December 11, 1946, Rajendra Prasad was elected its permanent President in due recognition of his selfless services to the country for many years. Several prominent members of the Assembly paid glowing tributes to him on this occasion.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan observed : "This Constituent Assembly has met to frame the Constitution, to effect the withdrawal of British control, political, economic and military, and to establish a free independent India. If successful, this transfer of authority will be the biggest and least bloody of all transfers in human history. A constitution is the fundamental law of the nation. It should embody and express the dreams and passions, the ideals and aspirations of the people. It must be based on the consent of all and respect the rights of all people who belong to this great land. It is not an accident that our temporary and permanent Chairmen come from Bihar. They are both impregnated with the spirit of *vihara,* the invincibility of gentleness —the gospel of India. According to the *Mahabharata* gentleness can overcome the hardest things; it can overcome the softest things. There is nothing impossible to be overcome by gentleness and, therefore, the sharpest weapon we have is gentleness. In Dr. Rajendra Prasad we have one who embodies this spirit of gentleness. He is the soul of goodness, he has great patience and courage, he has suffered. It is not an accident that this year which marks the sixtieth year of the Indian National Congress is also the year of opening of the Constituent Assembly. We have to remember with gratitude all those who worked and suffered for freedom of this country, for the dawn of this day. Thousands died, more thousands suffered privations, imprisonment and exile, and it is their suffering that has cemented and built up this great edifice of the Indian National Congress. Dr. Rajendra Prasad is the suffering servant of India, of the Congress, who incarnates the spirit for which this country stands."

N. Gopalaswami Ayyengar said : "Dr. Rajendra Prasad's life has been a life of dedication to the service of the country. It has been consecrated by his unique sacrifice. His innate courtesy, the manner of approach to problems which almost completely disarms controversy among people inclined to develop temper or heat, the soft word that turneth away wrath—these will be inestimable assets in contributing to the success of the tasks that he has so willingly, perhaps after some reluctance, taken upon himself."

Sarojini Naidu also remarked in her unique style : "Some time I was asked to compose an epic into an epigram about Dr. Rajendra Prasad. I was asked to say a line about Dr. Rajendra Prasad and I said that I could do so if I had a pen of gold dipped in a pot of honey because all the words will not suffice to explain his qualities or adequately to pay tribute to his qualities. I conceive him not as one with the flowing sword but as an angel with the lily which wins victories over the hearts of men, because in him there is essential sweetness, that is part of his strength, there is essential wisdom that is part of his experience, there is essential clarity of vision, creative imagination and creative faith that bring him very near the feet of Lord Buddha himself. He is the symbol of India's destiny today. He will help us in framing that charter that restores to our Mother—our Mother still in fetters—her rightful place as torch-bearer of liberty, love and peace."

In his inaugural address Rajendra Prasad stressed the self-governing and self-determining power of the Assembly and observed: "I am aware that this Assembly has been born with certain limitations placed on it from its birth. We may not forget, disregard or ignore these limitations in the course of our proceedings and in arriving at our decisions. But I know, too, that in spite of these limitations, the Assembly is a self-governing and self-determining, independent body in whose proceedings no outside authority can interfere and whose decisions no one outside can upset, alter or modify. Indeed, it is in the power of this Constituent Assembly to get rid of and demolish the very limitations which have been attached to it at its birth and I hope that you, ladies and gentlemen, who have come here to frame the constitution of an Independent and Free India, will be able to get rid of these limitations and place before the world a model constitution, that will satisfy the people of all groups and communities and religions inhabiting this vast land and will ensure to everyone freedom of action, of thought, of belief, and of worship, which will guarantee to everyone opportunities of rising to his highest, which will guarantee to everyone freedom in all respects. I hope and trust that this Constituent Assembly will, in course of time, be able to develop strength as all such assemblies have done.

It is most regrettable that many seats are unoccupied to-day in this Assembly. I am hoping that our friends of the Muslim League will soon come to occupy these places and will be glad to participate in this great work of creating a constitution for our people which according to the experience of all other nations of the world and according to our own experience, our own traditions and our own peculiar conditions, will guarantee to everyone all that they can require to be guaranteed, and will not leave any room for any complaint from any side. I am hoping also that you will do your best to achieve this great objective. Above all, what we need is freedom and as someone has said, nothing is more valuable than the freedom to be free. Let us hope that as a result of the labours of this Constituent Assembly, we shall have achieved freedom and be proud of it."

The door was open for the members of the Muslim League to join the Constituent Assembly. In a statement in the Constituent Assembly on January 20, 1947, Rajendra Prasad boldly pointed out that to describe the Constituent Assembly a "body of Hindus" or as "a meeting of caste Hindus", as some British statesmen like Churchill and Simon had done, "was a complete travesty of facts". Referring to facts, he noted that "out of a total of 296 members who were to take part in the preliminary session, 210 members attended. These 210 members consisted of 155 Hindus out of 160, 30 Scheduled Caste representatives out of a total of 33, all the five Sikhs, six Indian Christians out of a total of seven (one of them is also counted as a member of Backward Tribes), all the five representatives of Backward Tribes, all three Anglo-Indians, all three Parsis and four Muslims out of eighty. The significant absence is, of course, that of the representatives of the Muslim League—an absence which we all deeply regret."

But the Muslim League still maintained its uncompromising attitude about participating in the Constituent Assembly. At a meeting held at Karachi on January 31, 1947, its Working Committee expressed the opinion that "the elections to, and thereafter the summoning of the Constituent Assembly, in spite of strong protests and most emphatic objections on the part of the League, were *ab initio* void, invalid and illegal as not only the major parties had not accepted the statement but even the Sikhs and the Scheduled Castes had also not done so and that the continuation of the Constituent Assembly and its proceedings and decisions are *ultra vires,* invalid and illegal, and it should be forthwith dissolved."

In this situation of anomaly and uncertainty, the British Premier, Attlee, made a statement in the House of Commons on February, 20, 1947, to the effect that it was the British Government's "definite intention to take necessary steps to effect the transference of power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948". On the expiry of Lord Wavell's term of office as Viceroy and Governor-General of India, Lord Mountbatten assumed this office on March 24, 1947. With his keen intelligence and statesmanship of a high order, Lord Mountbatten took quick steps to accelerate India's march to the status of an independent country. He issued a plan on June 3 outlining therein the procedure to be followed for transference of power into the hands of Indians and the arrangements to be consequently made under the prevailing conditions, particularly in view of the non-participation of the members of the Muslim League in the Constituent Assembly though the majority of its members had already made progress in evolving a new constitution.

The Plan of June 3, prescribed partition of India. It was indeed tragic that the unity of India, which had been cherished by the poets, philosophers and statesmen of India since the days of remote antiquity and had been emphasised by leaders of renascent India, was thus going to be shattered. Though conscious of this limitation of the Plan, and expressing regret that it was "likely to lead to the secession of certain parts of the country from India", our national leaders and statesmen approved it under the irresistible pressure of circumstances in a highly critical situation.

As provided in para 20 of the announcement of June 3, 1947, the Indian Independence Bill was introduced in the British Parliament and passed in July 1947. According to it, from August 15, 1947, two independent Dominions, known respectively as India and Pakistan, came into existence and the territories of the new Dominions were defined.

On August 15, 1947, India attained independence and this is a red-letter day in the history of our country. Lord Mountbatten was sworn in as the Governor-General of India and he read out the message from His Majesty the King. Rajendra Prasad read out messages received from different countries. In his inaugural address, he made the following significant observations : "Let us in this momentous hour of our history, when we are assuming power for the governance of our country, recall in grateful remembrance the services and sacrifices of all those who laboured and suffered for the achievement of the independence we are attaining today. Let us on this historic occasion pay our homage to the maker of our modern history, Mahatma Gandhi, who has inspired and guided us through all these years of trial and travail and who in spite of the weight of years is still working in his own way to complete what is left yet unaccomplished.

"Let us gratefully acknowledge that while our achievement is in no small measure due to our own sufferings and sacrifices, it is also the result of world forces and events and last though not least it is the consummation and fulfilment of the historic traditions and democratic ideals of the British race whose far-sighted leaders and statesmen saw the vision and gave the pledges which are being redeemed to-day. We are happy to have in our midst as a representative of that race Viscount Mountbatten of Burma and his consort who have worked hard and played such an important part in bringing this about during the closing scenes of this drama. The period of domination by Britain over India ends today and our relationship with Britain is henceforward going to rest on a basis of equality, of mutual goodwill and mutual profit.

"It is undoubtedly a day of rejoicing. But there is only one thought which marks and detracts from the fullness of this happy event. India, which was made by God and nature to be one, which culture and tradition and history of millenniums have made one, is divided to-day and many there are on the other side of the boundary who would much rather be on this side. To them we send a word of cheer and assurance and ask them not to give way to panic or despair but to live with faith and courage in peace with their neighbours and fulfil the duties of loyal citizenship and thus win their rightful place. We send our greetings to the new Dominion which is being established there today and wish it the best luck in its great work of governing that region and making all its citizens happy and prosperous. We feel assured that there all will be treated fairly and justly without any distinction or discrimination. Let us hope and pray that the day will come when even those who have insisted upon and brought about this division will realise India's essential oneness and we shall be united once again. We must realise, however, that this can be brought about not by force but by large-heartedness and cooperation and by so managing our affairs on this side as to attract those who have parted. It may appear to be a dream but it is no more fantastic a dream than that of those who wanted a division and may well be realised even sooner than we dare hope for today.

"More than a day of rejoicing it is a day of dedication for all of us to build the India of our dreams. Let us turn our eyes away from other nations and countries and let us hope no one will pick a quarrel with us. By history and tradition we are a peaceful people and India wants to be at peace with the world. India's empire outside her own borders has been of a different kind from all other empires. India's conquests have been the conquests of spirit which did not impose heavy chains of slavery, whether of iron or of gold, on others but tied other lands and other peoples to her with the more enduring ties of golden silk of culture and civilisation, of religion and knowledge (*gyan*). We shall follow that same tradition and shall have no ambition save that of contributing our little mite to the building of peace and freedom in a war-distracted world by holding aloft the banner under which we have marched to victory and placing in a practical manner in the hands of the world the great weapon of non-violence which has achieved this unique result. India has a great part to play. There is something in her life and culture which has enabled her to survive the onslaughts of time and to-day we witness a new birth full of promise, if only we prove ourselves true to our ideals.

"Let us resolve to create conditions in this country when every individual will be free and provided with the wherewithal to develop and rise to his fullest stature, when poverty and squalor and ignorance and ill-health will have vanished, when the distinction between high and low, between rich and poor, will have disappeared, when religion will not only be professed and preached and practised freely but will have become a cementing force for binding man to man and not serve as a disturbing and disrupting force dividing and separating, when untouchability will have been forgotten like an unpleasant night dream, when exploitation of man by man will have ceased, when facilities and special arrangements will have been provided for the *Adimjatis* of India and for all others who are backward, to enable them to catch up with others and when this land will have not only enough food to feed its teeming millions but will once again have become a land flowing with rivers of milk, when men and women will be laughing and working for all they are worth in fields and factories, when every cottage and hamlet will be humming with the sweet music of village handicrafts and maids will be busy with them and singing to their tune—when the sun and the moon will be shining on happy homes and loving faces.

"We have up to now been taking a pledge to achieve freedom and to undergo all sufferings and sacrifices for it. Time has come when we have to take a pledge of another kind. Let no one imagine that the time for work and sacrifice is gone and the time for enjoying the fruits thereof has come. Let us realise that the demand on our enthusiasm and capacity for unselfish work in the future will be as great as, if not greater than, what it has ever been before. We have, therefore, to dedicate ourselves once again to the great cause that beckons us. The task is great, the times are propitious. Let us pray that we may have the strength, the wisdom and the courage to fulfil it."

To frame a constitution for this vast country, with about 400 million people, numerous diversities, communal differences, and the problem of the Indian States, was certainly a gigantic task. But it was accomplished within three years under the able and inspiring guidance of Rajendra Prasad and with unstinted cooperation of our prominent leaders and statesmen all of whom worked indefatigably in different committees with a spirit of devotion to the true interests of the country. The Constitution for the Sovereign

Democratic Republic of India was adopted in the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949. At the closing session of the Constituent Assembly on that day Rajendra Prasad significantly observed: "It was a unique victory which was achieved by the unique method taught by the Father of the Nation—Mahatma Gandhi—and it is up to us to preserve and protect the independence that we have won and to make it really bear fruit for the man in the street." He also described on this occasion the salient features of the Constitution.

On January 26, 1950, Rajendra Prasad was sworn in as President of the Republic of India. "The objective of our Republic", he remarked on this occasion, "is to secure justice, liberty and equality for its citizens and to promote fraternity among the people who inhabit its extensive territories and follow different religions, speak various languages, and observe their peculiar customs. We want to live on terms of friendship with all other countries. Our future programme includes eradication of disease, poverty and ignorance. We are anxious to rehabilitate and resettle all those displaced persons who have suffered and are still suffering great hardships and privations. Those who are handicapped in any way deserve special help. It is essential that in order to achieve this, we must safeguard the freedom that is ours to-day. But economic and social freedom are as urgent a demand of the times as political freedom. The present requires of us even greater devotion and sacrifice than the past. I hope and pray that we shall be able to utilise the opportunity that has been given to us. We should dedicate all our material and physical strength to the service of our people. I also hope that the people, while rejoicing on the advent of this auspicious and happy day, will realise their heavy responsibility and rededicate themselves to the fulfilment of the great objective for which the Father of the Nation lived, worked and died".

Hailing this occasion as the commencement of a glorious era in the history of India, the Press wrote in eloquent terms about the manifold virtues of Rajendra Prasad. The *Hindustan Times,* a leading English daily, noted : "He (President Rajendra Prasad) considered himself as one among the common people and never allowed any distance to grow between him and them. The higher he rose in the service of the nation, the nearer he seemed to come to his people, with the result that the humblest among them could approach him as easily as though he were a co-villager. The honours that came to him unasked sat so lightly on him that it was no wonder that the people decided to bestow on him the highest honour which free India can confer on any citizen. With him as President, the country and the world at large have the guarantee that Republican India will remain ever true to the essentials of Gandhiji's creed of betterment of the lot of the people at home and furtherance of the cause of peace abroad."

The Statesman commented : "That country's warm congratulations go to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, unanimously chosen as first President, who presided earlier over the Constituent Assembly and has been three times President of the Indian National Congress. A convinced Gandhian and a hard and selfless worker in the national cause, representing the solid core of the Congress tradition, he is an obvious and popular choice for the highest office that India can bestow." *The Tribune* observed : "All along his life, Dr. Rajendra Prasad has stuck to certain principles from which he has never deviated. People generally know about his straight and upright politics, but many do not know that just when he had started making headway at the Bar, he made up his mind not to accept every case. He thought that the legal profession was not incompatible with honesty. He would not accept a brief which he thought was weak on moral or social grounds. Here again one feels tempted to compare him with Abraham Lincoln. When he was practising in Illinois, a client came to Lincoln for advice. After he had gone through his papers and heard him fully, Lincoln gave him the following advice :

'I can win your case; I can get you 600 dollars. I can also make an honest family miserable. But I shall not take your case and I shall not take your fee. One piece of advice I will give you gratis, Go home and think seriously whether you cannot make 600 dollars in some honest way.'

"So was the case with Dr. Prasad who found himself unable to take every brief that came to him.

"Those who have had the privilege of knowing Dr. Prasad and coming into contact with him cannot fail to see that he has infinite patience, uncommon forbearance and almost other-worldly tolerance.

"If one were to describe Dr. Rajendra Prasad's personality in one word, one might say that he is a man of exemplary simplicity. He believes that it is harmful for man to go on multiplying his needs unnecessarily.

"Dr. Rajendra Prasad has an inherent preference for the 'golden mean' and as a rule, avoids extremes. Nevertheless, where principles are involved, he is as stiff and uncompromising as anybody can be.

"This happy combination of qualities is good in any leader of men, but it is particularly welcome to us to-day in a man on whom the mantle of Presidentship of the Indian Republic has fallen."

The *Indian Express* remarked : "It is indeed exceedingly lucky that soon after her political emancipation, India has been able to have as her First Citizen a man of the stature of Rajendra Prasad who embodies in him the wisdom of the sages, the tolerance and considerateness of Gautama Buddha and the self-denial and equanimity of Mahavira. The tribute paid to him on his election as President by an eminent public man would bear repetition. He said of Rajendra Prasad : "Here is a man who in all the heated controversies of party strife and mortal conflicts of political warfare has not caused or received a single bruise. There is nothing like bitterness in him and political acerbities have left him unscathed. His gentleness and innate nobility, his simplicity and sweetness, his sincerity of conviction and earnestness of purpose, and above all his selflessness have given him a moral stature that the nation has learnt to adore. His whole philosophy of life is so Gandhian in substance and spirit that he is readily accepted as one who can in his role as President of the Indian Republic best maintain the Gandhian tradition, and bring honour to the Motherland in whose service he has grown grey."

The *Times of India* commented : "To the veteran Dr. Rajendra Prasad the nation as a whole accords a warm and respectful welcome as first President. Apart from his long career of self-sacrifice in the national struggle for independence and his constructive leadership of the Constituent Assembly in the intensive and arduous labour which has produced the Republican Constitution, Dr. Prasad has the unrivalled distinction of being loved and respected by supporters and opponents alike. He is a man of exceptional gentility and humility whose genius for commanding the confidence of all sections of Congressmen as well as of the general public has done as much to give him the outstanding position he holds in the country as have his learning and unstinting work. For a long time he has suffered in health to an extent sufficient to discourage much younger men; but always has he carried on with national effort as a labour of love. As his pacifism so trenchantly proclaimed at the recent conferences in Shantiniketan and Wardha, he today personifies more than any other single leading individual in India's political world the true spirit of Mahatma Gandhi which has become too conspicuous by its absence. There can be no single person in the country who by his career, lack of pretension and yet brilliant qualities, is more suited to personify as the first President of India the deep-seated ideals which have inspired the creation of the Republic."

Rajendra Prasad was re-elected President after the first election in 1952. He observed in the swearing-in ceremony on May 15 : "As an individual and countryman of yours and even more so as a comrade with many of you in the struggle for India's freedom, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for this signal mark of your confidence, but even more than the gratitude, I feel the heavy responsibility and burden of this high office.

"The establishment of this democratic republic could only take place after the attainment of Independence. It is, therefore, the first and most important duty of everyone of us to preserve and protect this freedom which we have secured after generations of struggle and sacrifice. It is our earnest aim to improve and raise the masses of our people, but all our plans for improvement and uplift of the country depend upon the preservation of our freedom. Our entire life, national and individual, revolves round that basic freedom. It is my duty, as it is yours, to preserve and protect this freedom at all costs.

"It will be my first and foremost endeavour in performing this duty to treat all our people belonging to the different parts of the country, to various classes, creeds and schools of thought, with equality and impartiality. Another duty, which I share with you, will be to seek the friendship of all countries and to find ways of cooperation with them.

"My request to all the people of this country is to treat me as one of them and to give me the opportunity and encouragement to serve them to the best of my capacity. I pray that God may give me the strength and wisdom to dedicate myself in the true spirit of service to the fulfilment of my duties and responsibilities."

Rajendra Prasad was re-elected as President in May 1957.

There have been differences of opinion as to whether it is obligatory for the President to accept ministerial advice in all cases and under all circumstances. During the debates in the Constituent Assembly, Rajendra Prasad himself said : "Although there is no specific provision in the Constitution itself making it binding on the President to accept the advice of his Ministers, it is hoped that the convention under which in England the King always acted on the advice of his Ministers would be established in this country also and that the President would not act so much on account of the written word in the Constitution but as the result of this very healthy convention will become a constitutional President in all matters." In the course of the debates, Jawaharlal Nehru said : "...... At the same time we did not want to make the President just a figure-head like the French President[1]. We did not give him any real power but have made his position one of great authority and dignity." Authority here meant 'legal powers'.

The late Dr. B. N. Rau, one of the most eminent jurists of our country with profound knowledge of constitutional affairs and with important contributions to his credit in drawing up the Constitution of the Republic of India, significantly observed that "India has a written Constitution which expressly embodies some of the conventions of the

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[1] In those days

British Constitution". But he also noted that "The Indian Constitution differs materially from the British, not only in being a written Constitution, but also in its contents. The Head of State in Great Britain is a hereditary monarch; in India he is an elected President, who is eligible for re-election. He is, therefore, responsible to his constituents for his acts, which implies that he should have freedom to act as he thinks right. He should not, therefore, be held to be bound by any convention to act upon the advice of others even when he considers such advice unsound."[2] He also notes that "even if in any particular instance the President acts otherwise than on ministerial advice, the validity of the Act cannot be questioned in a Court on that ground". Considering whether "the President under the Indian Constitution is a figure-head", the same learned author wrote: "Far from it. Like the King in England, he will have the right 'to be consulted, to encourage or to warn.' Acting on ministerial advice does not necessarily mean immediate acceptance of the Ministry's first thoughts. The President can state all his objections to any proposed course of action and ask his Ministers-in-Council, if necessary, to reconsider the matter. It is only in the last resort that he should accept their final advice. It has been observed that the influence of the Crown—and of the House of Lords as well—in England has grown with every curtailment of its legal powers by convention or statute. A similar result is likely to follow in India too; for, as has been well said, 'the voice of reason is more readily heard when it can persuade but no longer coerce.' One can conceive of no better future for the President of India than that he should be more and

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2. B. N. Rau, *India's Constitution in the Making* with a foreword by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, p. 377, edited by B. Shiva Rao and published in 1960

more like the monarch in England, eschewing legal power, standing outside the clash of parties and gaining in moral authority".

K. M. Munshi has rightly pointed out that the President "was expected to be a political force representing national unity, and, as will be seen from the express provisions of the Constitution, was invested as such with authority, dignity, and residual power, so that, when political parties developed inflexible attitudes, he being above party, could restrain their excesses and defend the Constitution. His principal role was 'to prevent a parliamentary government from becoming parliamentary anarchy', or a majority government from indulging in constitutional excesses." The Presidential office in India, remarked Dr. L. M. Singhvi (in 1967) in connection with the elections, "is *sui generis,* and has both authority and dignity. The President has certain residual and reserve powers and in certain contingencies he is conceived as the symbol of national unity, stability and continuity."[3]

Whatever might be the nature or form of a Constitution, its excellence and successful working depend on the personality and character of the man at the apex of it and of others also on whom devolves the responsibility for carrying on the administration. Fortunately for us our Presidents up till now have been outstanding personalities in all respects. So far as Rajendra Prasad is concerned, he occupied this exalted office with dignity and grace by virtue of his genial temperament, amiable disposition, accommodating attitude and rational outlook and also long-standing cordial relations with the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. But as a great lover of truth, he never sacrificed his conscience for any consideration and when necessary he tendered sober advice and conformed to his views about right things with firm conviction. The postponement of the Hindu Code Bill in 1951 is an instance in point. As this Bill sought to modify the traditional conditions of Hindu society with regard to inheritance and marriage and there was a volume of public opinion against it, its consideration was postponed under his advice till after the elections.

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[3] *The Statesman*, May 5, 1967

Elevation to the exalted position did not effect any change in Rajendra Prasad's old and austere habits about food and dress. He used home-spun clothes of *Khaddar* except on ceremonial occasions. Being a strict vegetarian, he inaugurated the 15th World Vegetarian Congress at Bombay on November 9, 1957. He considered the salary of Rs. 10,000 a month with a sumptuary allowance of Rs. 2,500 too high. As a statutory reduction in this could not be made without an amendment in the Constitution, he effected some voluntary cuts so that by July 1960, his salary came to be reduced to Rs. 2,500 a month, which was subject to usual taxes.

Rajendra Prasad was always above ostentation and luxury. With an instinctive love for mankind in general, he utilized the opportunities of his high office for true service of the common man and made himself accessible to all with due courtesy whenever anybody wanted to meet him. He loved to make personal contacts with people in different parts of India which he visited as often as possible, in spite of his old age and delicate health, by touring for about 150 days a year including six weeks of stay at the Rashtrapati Nilayam at Bolaram in Hyderabad which he formally occupied on August 14, 1955.

In spite of his old age and delicate health, Rajendra Prasad kept himself ceaselessly active with genuine interest in all matters of importance in human society. He inaugurated numerous functions, presided over countless meetings and conferences and addressed convocations of most of the Indian Universities and several cultural organisations. We may mention here some of his engagements by way of illustration. He inaugurated the Silver Jubilee session of the Inter-University Board at Banaras on February 28, 1950; delivered the Convocation Address at the Banaras Hindu University on the same day; addressed the Convocation of the Gurukul Kangri University at Kangri (Hardwar) on March 5, 1950; opened the National Fuel Research Institute at Digwadih in Jharia Coalfields on April 22, 1950; inaugurated the Exhibition of the Sacred Relics of Lord Buddha and his two chief disciples at the Maha Bodhi Hall in New Delhi on August 21, 1950; inaugurated the fourth annual meeting of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics in New Delhi on November 14, 1950; delivered an address in Hindi at the 28th Convocation of the Delhi University on December 9, 1950, and at the 30th Convocation of the Nagpur University on December 26, 1950; and inaugurated the Nagpur session of the Indian History Congress on December 27, 1950. During the year 1951, he addressed the Third Convocation of the Punjab University on January 6; laid the foundation-stone of the Ramjas College in the University Enclave, Delhi, on January 17; opened the Engineering Block of the Birla Vidya Mandir at Pilani on February 11; and the All-India Art and Craft Exhibition in New Delhi on February 17; laid the foundation-stone of the Saraswati Mandir at Allahabad on February 20; delivered the Convocation Address at the Lady Irwin College, New Delhi, on March 1; inaugurated the All-India Cultural Conference at Delhi on March 15 and the Braj Sahitya Mandal at Hathras on April 5; inaugurated the Thirukkural Research Institute at the University Buildings, Madras, on April 7; addressed a Special Convocation of the Mysore University on April 10; laid the foundation-stone of the Vikram Kirti

Mandir, Ujjain, on May 8; spoke on the occasion of the installation of the idol of Lord Somnath in the Somnath Temple at Patan on May 11; and addressed a Special Convocation at the Osmania University, Hyderabad, on August 30. On November 5 he addressed a Special Convocation of the Delhi University, held to confer the Degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa,* on the leader and one member of the Chinese Cultural Delegation, and recalled on this occasion the old cultural bonds between India and China. On November 20, he laid the foundation-stone of the Magadh Research Institute (*Nava Nalanda Mahavihara*) at the historic site of the Nalanda University, an ancient centre of cosmopolitan culture of international repute. In his speech here he presented a brief account of its glorious role in the past. "The message of Nalanda", he observed, "was heard across the mountains and oceans of the Asian mainland and, for nearly six centuries, it continued to be the centre of Asian consciousness." While laying the foundation-stone of the Sanskrit Research Institute at Darbhanga on November 21, 1951, he emphasised the importance of Sanskrit literature as "an invaluable treasure-house not only for India, but also for the whole world". He expressed the hope that "educated Indians would help in bringing about a Sanskrit renaissance" and that Sanskrit scholars should also try to be familiar with trends of modern knowledge. He inaugurated the 27th session of the International Statistical Institute at New Delhi on December 5, 1951; delivered the Convocation Address at the Aligarh University on December 8, 1951; inaugurated the 5th Annual Meeting of the Indian Council of Agricultural Statistics at New Delhi on December 12, 1951; the Joint Meeting of the Inter-University Board of India and the Executive Council of the Association of the Universities of the British Commonwealth at the Delhi University on December 21, 1951; and the 17th Annual Meeting of the Indian Academy of Sciences at New Delhi on December 27, 1951.

On December 23, 1952, Rajendra Prasad delivered the Convocation Address in Bengali at the Vishva-Bharati, Shantiniketan, as its *Paridarshaka* (*Visitor*). This University presented a welcome address to him. It said that their first Convocation would ever remain a red-letter day in their calendar, not only because it was the first one to be held in their new status as a Statutory University but also because the occasion was graced with the presence of the foremost citizen of India who as her first President symbolized in himself their great nation.

After paying homage to the sacred memory of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and Gurudev Rabindranath, and tracing the early history and ideals of this great institution, Rajendra Prasad remarked significantly that from the very beginning Gurudev "made this institution the centre of a new humanity—in which each individual has love for human values delighted by the beauties of nature, is the single-minded devotee of the ethical consciousness in the bosom of the universe and has completely identified himself with the world spirit". Before entraining for Calcutta, Rajendra Prasad drove round Shantiniketan, Vinayapalli and Shriniketan in the company of the Upachary. One of the places visited by him was the residence of Dr. Nandalal Bose, the famous artist, where he spent some time by the latter's sick-bed and made enquiries about his health. He presented to Dr. Bose the academic robe along with the honorary degree.

Possessed of strong moral convictions, Rajendra Prasad drew the attention of our people to the growing set-back in our moral standards under several highly unwholesome influences, which became, according to some, more acute after partition. "Even apart from this", he remarked, "our social ideas are more or less in the melting pot, our ideals and moral standards are undergoing much change. In this country, we have certain fundamental moral concepts which are more or less self-evident postulates. Now, people are inclined to question them. There are people who not only question them, but who regard them as reactionary and sometimes even condemn them. My plea is that you should recognise what is good in these concepts and try, as far as possible, to remove the defects instead of trying to build a new social fabric about the soundness of which we cannot be sure, because it is after all a matter of experiment. I may be old-fashioned, but I feel that we should rather build upon our old foundations than go along an altogether new path which may be quite good for other countries.

"We have to face the moral problem as a social evil. To my mind, the most obvious cause of this evil is the upsetting of the standard of continence which we, in this country, used to observe. In spite of that high standard of moral restraint we have this evil. If the restraints are removed, I do not know where shall we be and to what extent we may go down. I am, therefore, anxious that something should be done to check the fall. I am rather suspicious of too much modernisation and request you to remember that modernisation should be based only upon what has been tried and found to be useful in the past. I may, in this connection, refer to the influence of the cinema. Modern films have played havoc with our society in general and particularly with young boys and girls. If I had the power, I would stop the exhibition of films which create sexual lust. I would also stop free mixing between the sexes which is opposed to customary restraint. It is prevalent in foreign countries where it has been in practice for centuries, but its introduction here is bound to upset our social life.

"We shall have to tackle this problem at its root. This cannot be done by legislation. Legislation has its values, but it cannot root out this evil. It is the individual's own moral standard, his own diagnosis of the situation, his own way of looking at things which really matters. I hope you will restore the high standard of continence and bring about an atmosphere in which real strength is to be won by restraints which are enjoined upon us. I think, unless we do this, we shall be swept away by the current of demoralisation."[4]

The Presidency College in Calcutta, one of the oldest institutions for higher education in India, where Rajendra Prasad spent some valuable years of the formative period of his life as a student from 1902 to 1907, was very dear to him. The teachers and students of this college had the privilege of welcoming him there on December 24, 1952. He first visited the Eden Hindu Hostel in the morning of that day and spent there some time in conversation with a few of his old associates in this hostel, who had been specially invited on this occasion, in one of the rooms where he used to stay as a boarder. Then he entered the College compound. After he had met some of his old friends, who were in the Library Hall, and had seen the photographs of his teachers like the late H. M. Percival, the late Benoyendra Nath Sen, the late Manmohan Ghosh, the late Jogendranath Dasgupta and some others, he was escorted to a big and well-decorated *pandal* in the college. In an impressive function held here he narrated in his speech, delivered in plain and chaste Bengali, his old reminiscences regarding this college. With his usual modesty, he said that whatever he had learnt here proved to be valuable assets of his life. The students of the Presidency College and the boarders of the Eden Hindu Hostel presented welcome addresses to Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

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[4] *Inaugural Speech at the Conference of the All-India Moral and Social Hygiene*, October 19, 1950.

In spite of his numerous pre-occupations, Rajendra Prasad once again visited the Presidency College to preside over its centenary celebrations on June 15, 1953. In the afternoon of June 16, he formally opened the Centenary Exhibition. In the speech delivered by Rajendra Prasad in Bengali on the occasion of the Centenary on June 15, he said, "It is no ordinary occasion as the Presidency College is no ordinary institution....It has not only witnessed in all its phases the great changes India has been passing through in one of the most significant periods in her long history, but which has contributed through its *alumni* in a large measure to the conduct and eventual success of the various national movements launched one after another till their culmination in the country's liberation in August, 1947."

Rajendra Prasad delivered Convocation Addresses at the Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jullundur, on September 29, 1952; at Annamalai University on February 21, 1953; and at Patna University on March 11, 1953. He opened the building of the Gauhati University on February 21, 1954, laid the foundation stone of the Prakrit Research Institute, Vaisali, North Bihar, on April 23, 1956, addressed the Convocation of the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha, Madras, on August 18, 1956, and the Buddha Jayanti ceremony at New Delhi on May 24, 1956; inaugurated the Buddhist Art Exhibition at Delhi on November 10, 1956, and delivered a highly inspiring speech at the concluding function of the Buddha Jayanti, New Delhi, on November 24, 1956, opened the Bihar Martyrs' Memorial at Patna on the October 24, 1956, laid the foundation stone of the International Academy of Indian Culture on November 30, 1956 and inaugurated the National Council of Applied Economic Research on December 18, 1956. In July, 1958, he laid the foundation stone of the Nistarini

Girls' College at Purulia in the Manbhum district. On October 7, 1959, Dr. Prasad opened the Students' Home in the premises of the Ramakrishna Mission at Patna. After recalling his earlier association with the Ramakrishna Mission and recounting the various services which the Mission had been rendering "in building man and in building character", he expressed his desire that the Ramakrishna Mission should "become the centre to radiate that moral climate by which youths could form character to become better men to serve the country and the nation".

CHAPTER XV

GOODWILL MISSIONS ABROAD

BESIDES his diverse activities within the country, President Prasad also played an important role in pursuit of India's historic mission of world fellowship.

India's achievements in the past in the different spheres of life were splendid, and two highly significant features in the history of her civilisation have been the marvellous catholicity of her culture and universalism of her thought. "To know our country one has to travel to that age", observed Rabindranath Tagore, "when she realised her soul and thus transcended her physical boundaries, when she revealed her being in a radiant magnanimity which illumined the eastern horizon, making her recognised as their own by those in alien shores who were awakened into a new surprise of life. . . ." India's culture indeed exercised a 'profound influence on the countries of Middle-East and South-East Asia for centuries. To revive that cultural link for promotion of true harmony has been one of the supremely significant aims of new India. As a matter of fact, all the great apostles of renaissant India, from Raja Rammohan Roy to Gandhi, have been ardent prophets of international concord and universal fellowship. "India, awakened and free", wrote Mahatma Gandhi, "has a message of peace and goodwill to give to a groaning world."

With a genuine faith in the cult of universal brotherhood and deep cultural affinities, our first President, Rajendra Prasad, went to different countries on goodwill missions. Visiting Nepal in 1956, he spoke at the Royal banquet at Kathmandu on October 22, 1956, that "any threat to the peace and security of Nepal is as much a threat to the peace and security of India." President Prasad visited Japan from September 26 to October 5, 1958. He was accorded a grand and warm ovation by the people of Japan and for the first time in the history of Japan her Emperor received at the airport a Head of State other than a Royal personage visiting their State. President Prasad went to Odware. Kyoto, Nara and Osaka. He visited ancient temples, universities and modern industrial centres. Honorary doctorates in Buddhology and literature were conferred on him by the Universities of Ohthni and Ryukoku. President Prasad's modesty, deep learning, brilliant exposition of Gandhian philosophy and his discourses on the teachings of the Buddha and Buddhist philosophy made a profound impression on the minds of the people of this land which had an intimate cultural link with India since the days of antiquity through Buddhist religion and literature. He referred to this in the course of his speech at the University of Ohthni, one of the oldest universities of Japan. "It has been", observed President Prasad, "one of the peculiar characteristics of Indian thought and practice to give full and unstinted freedom and as a consequence to recognise diversities of opinion and practice, and ultimately to find an all-embracing synthesis to bring together all the divergent elements of thought and theory. Not only do the *Upanishads* proclaim the freedom of mind that man enjoyed in those days, the growth of Buddhism itself was a demonstration of this basic factor in our mental structure. This process has gone on uninterrupted. The emergence of different schools in Buddhism itself, the *Mahayana* and *Hinayana* with their numerous branches, indicates the same line of growth and acceptance by the Buddhists all over the world of the fundamental freedom of the human mind." In his address at the Ryukoku University, he made a signi-

significant reference to the study of Sanskrit in some of the universities of Japan, which also served to perpetuate India's bond of cultural fellowship with Japan and some other countries.

It was at Tokyo that President Prasad addressed the biggest meeting in Japan. It was of particular significance as here he expounded lucidly and forcefully the different aspects of Gandhian philosophy, especially his technique of Satyagraha with its insistence on truth and non-violence which enabled India to win freedom from alien domination. With his faith in the efficacy of Gandhian philosophy for removing the evils in the present-day world with emphasis on non-violent means for solution of international problems, he said : "Gandhiji used to say that non-violence is not for the coward but for those who are really and truly brave. An armed man does not depend solely upon himself, but also upon his arms for his safety. The truly non-violent resister depends upon nothing else except his own strong heart and faith in God; and if nations could realise the strength of this kind of non-violence, I have no doubt that many of the ills from which we are suffering and the disaster which we are all apprehending will be dispelled as darkness before sunlight. . . .The face of the world will change if any country, even though it be a small country, were to disarm itself completely and challenge the world to do its worst against it. It would by so doing disarm the whole world against itself, and if bigger and more powerful nations could adopt it, it would cease to be a troubled world and would become a heaven on earth."

President Prasad said in the course of his speech at a State banquet in Tokyo : "It may sound platitudinous but it is a fact which our past history confirms and which the peoples of our two countries cherish in their memories that Japan and India have had close cultural relationship and contacts which have led to many useful exchanges in several spheres of human activity. We naturally feel happy that the old relationship has once again been reinforced in modern times by the friendliest ties of understanding, mutual regard and the desire to be of help to each other in the wider interests of our peoples and the world at large.

"To-day we are living in a world where advancement of science and technology has changed the entire perspective not only of the individual but of human society as a whole. This changed perspective has challenged many an old concept. It is imperative for human progress as also for human happiness that we consider the situation calmly and decide whether the newly acquired knowledge should prove to be a boon or a curse to humanity. The latest discoveries about the atomic power pose a big question which must be answered. Shall we allow these discoveries to work for the utter destruction of mankind or shall we use them for the removal of human want and misery ? It is a question which concerns everyone, every nation, big or small, and in the interest of the survival of the human race we must strive hard so that the power which the scientific discoveries have brought within our reach is used to improve the lot of men and nations and not as means of total annihilation.

"This constitutes, in my opinion, a good enough explanation for the universal desire for peace which is so much in evidence today. Let me hope that it will be realised that the time has come for reckoning the new factors and boldly recognising the necessity of adjusting human relations accordingly. It may mean, in a sense, a break with the past. It certainly means turning a new corner.

"Let every nation strive for peace by abjuring aggression and subscribing to the view that all international disputes should be settled amicably in a spirit of tolerance and accommodation.

"It is a matter of sincere gratification that your Majesty's Government subscribes to the ideal of peace and international amity. May I say that India is also wedded to the same ideal and tries to make such contribution as it can towards its attainment in its own humble way ? The sharing of a common ideal has strengthened the bonds of age-old friendship between India and Japan and I feel sure that these bonds will continue to grow stronger and stronger as time passes."

While bidding farewell to the people of Japan, President Prasad observed : "I carry with me the impression of a hard-working and disciplined people who by their determination have overcome many difficulties. There is much that other countries in Asia can learn from Japan, her highly developed cottage industries and farming technique, her industrial efficiency and marketing organisation."

President Prasad was highly impressed by Japan's progress in various spheres of life after a quick recovery from the blows of World War II. He exhorted the Indians staying there to emulate its example and said : "I also know that the people of Japan are very industrious and self-sacrificing. They have built up their trade and industry with sustained effort. They are once again on their feet after only a few years since the war. Their hard work and determination should be an object lesson for all of us. All these things you should learn and carry with you to the mother country."

Dr. Rajendra Prasad visited Indonesia in December 1958. Here also he received a highly enthusiastic welcome from millions of local people since his arrival at Djakarta. Addressing the Indonesian Parliament on December 10, he referred to the conditions needed for success of a parliamentary democracy. He emphasised on the growth of "living consciousness" in the minds of the people regarding their duties towards the State.

At the city of Bandung, where the Afro-Asian Conference met in 1955, President Prasad was greeted with a profound ovation and enthusiasm. Deeply moved at this, he remarked before a huge assemblage of people: "I do not possess words to express my feelings of thankfulness for the great honour you have extended to me. For the last forty years I have been moving among crowds in my country and I cannot recollect many occasions when I have been greeted by such enthusiastic crowds."

The University of Bandung conferred on President Prasad a doctorate degree *honoris causa*. In a speech delivered by him on this occasion, he strongly pleaded for observance of Gandhian ideals and development of the Gandhian outlook.

Leaving Bandung, President Prasad visited, for three days, the islands of Java and Bali where he saw plenty of historical evidence regarding the influence of the essential features of Indian civilisation on the people of those regions.

Before leaving Indonesia, President Prasad addressed a mammoth public meeting in Djakarta's Merdeka Square on December 18. In it he made a touching reference to that country's old connection with India for many years. After discussing the importance of Gandhian ideals in relation to international problems, he urged nuclear disarmament for world harmony. "The only effective answer", he observed, "to the atom and hydrogen bomb is not more of such bombs, but complete abolition of them, and only a nation of brave people can achieve that by defying death and annihilation. ....Universal disarmament is our ideal and we look forward to the day when it will become a reality."

President Prasad observed in his speech at a State banquet held in his honour by the Indonesian President, Dr. Soekarno : "You and I are not strangers to each other. We have met before, and you already know how deeply I value and esteem your friendship. You also know how high you are in the esteem of my people. We know you as a great and tireless fighter for the freedom of your country and as a symbol of the hopes and the aspirations of your people. We have watched with admiration how you have led your people through years of travail, and we hope fervently that you will continue to lead them in their steady progress towards the glorious future that is their destiny.

"Both our people have drawn inspiration from our common struggle for freedom. Representatives of both our countries have, in the deliberations of various international organisations in which our countries participated, lent their support to the demand for freedom and independence of dependent peoples particularly in Asia and Africa, who were or still are under foreign domination.

"Basically our national problems are similar. Having gained freedom, our countries are engaged in the more complex and difficult task of giving economic and social content to our freedom. Without these essential developments, which improve the lot of the common man, liberty, freedom, independence, etc., have little meaning.

"There is a community of ideals, hopes and aspirations between our two Governments and our two peoples. We have worked together for these ideals in the past and we shall continue to work more closely together for the same ideals, in future."

In the same year, President Prasad visited the State of Malaya which had attained independence shortly before. On his arrival at Kuala Lumpur on December 6, 1958, the paramount ruler of Malaya received him, and a large number of people, with many Indians settled there, gave him a warm welcome.

In many of his speeches the President of India recalled the old cultural contacts between the two countries and expressed the hope that both would be bound together in close ties of amity making due contributions for freedom and happiness of the peoples of the world.

Commenting on President Prasad's visit to Malaya, *The Straits Times* of Singapore observed that "Malaya remembered warmly a country with which it had many links. These included Indian cultural influences, Indian immigrants and fellow-membership in the Commonwealth."

On March 15, 1959, Rajendra Prasad flew on a goodwill mission, for fourteen days, to Cambodia, North Vietnam, South Vietnam and Laos. On his arrival at Phnom Penh the same day he was received by Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness Prince Norodom Sihanouk. Welcoming the President of India, on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen of Cambodia, Prince Norodom observed : "It is not easy to suggest today what we admire in you most, the political leader inspired by liberty and justice, the eminent jurist who has dedicated his brilliant qualities entirely to the country's service, or the sensitive writer who appears to have reached, through meditation and in serenity of spirit, the farthest horizons of human thought." He referred to old cultural ties between the two countries and by admiring India's policy of toleration and enlightenment embodied in *Panch Sheel* expressed his belief that it would profoundly influence the history of the world.

President Prasad expressed his sincere thanks to His Majesty the King of Cambodia and the people of that area for the cordial reception and hospitality which they had extended to him.

The Indians settled at Phnom Penh gave a reception in honour of President Prasad. In his reply, he advised them to be real representatives of old India and also of new India and expressed satisfaction at their successful business enterprises there.

President Prasad also gave a banquet in honour of the King and Queen of Cambodia and referred in his speech on this occasion to the need for disarmament and abandonment of nuclear weapons. Her Majesty the Queen of Cambodia replying recalled their debt to India and to her old culture and observed that in the shaken world of theirs, India remained the indispensable mediator whose judgment constituted the surest guarantee of world peace.

President Prasad's next visit was to South Vietnam, where also on his arrival at Saigon's Tan-Son-Nhut airport, he was accorded a hearty welcome. President Ngo-Dinh-Diem of South Vietnam welcomed him in highly appreciative terms expressing the hope that his visit would foster greater cooperation and amity between the two countries for the good of humanity at large. In reply, President Prasad reciprocated these noble thoughts through highly inspiring words. The Key of the City of Saigon was presented to President Prasad by its Prefect and thanking the people of the place for this, he observed that he considered it to be a symbol of their deep cordiality.

President Prasad was taken round the Saigon Museum and he also visited the National University of Vietnam. In his address to the representatives of the Universities and Cultural Associations of South Vietnam, President Prasad spoke of the tremendous development of science and technology and also of the marvellous awakening among the peoples in different countries, particularly in Asia and Africa, after centuries of suppression and slumber. He pleaded that both these forces, instead of causing destruction and havoc, should be well utilised for creative purposes, for growth of spiritual values and for promotion of international amity and happiness of mankind.

The Democratic Republic of North Vietnam was the next country to be visited by President Prasad. President Ho Chi Minh received him at the Gaylon airport. Speaking at a banquet given in honour of President Prasad, President Ho Chi Minh observed: "Rajendra Prasad is a man who has during his whole life been fighting for the cause of national liberation of the Indian people. He is an old combatant with great experience, who has continuously struggled for peace in the world and friendship among nations. His virtues set a brilliant example for us to follow. The Vietnamese people greately appreciate the contribution made by India to the peace of the world and specially in Indo-China where she has assumed a heavy responsibility as Chairman of the Intrnational Commission for Supervision and Control". President Prasad gave a suitable reply.

Pham van Dong, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam, also arranged a banquet in honour of President Prasad. The speeches delivered by both on this occasion contained references to India's contributions to the cause of world peace and international relationship through the principles of *Panch Sheel*.

The people of Hanoi arranged a big civic reception for President Prasad. In his speech at this assemblage, he emphasised the need for peace in the age of nuclear weapons and said that by following the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, India was trying her best to promote the cause of peace and harmony among different countries.

President Prasad had a very pleasant experience during his visit to the Vietnam University. In his welcome speech, the Director of the University referred to President Prasad's valuable contributions to the literature on India's national movement and also described his manifold qualities as a man of exemplary character. President Prasad gave a modest reply to all that had been said about him. Speaking about an ideal society, he expressed the view that it may be established if all the recent triumphs of science and developments of human knowledge were harnessed for the good of humanity instead of being misused for destructive activities.

The tenets of Buddhism and teaching of Mahatma Gandhi, which had proclaimed to the world a message of love, harmony, non-violence and tolerance were commended by President Prasad to the audience for curing the maladies of tormented humanity. Gandhiji, he said, did not belong to one particular country but was a world prophet, an angel of love and peace. In his speech at the banquet given by him in honour of President Ho Chi Minh, he remarked : "Our heritage flows into a very enriching channel. Two thousand years ago through a message that transcended the barriers of geography, it came to your land and to the other countries of Asia from India. The echoes of that message are still vibrating within us and will continue to colour and shape our lives for all time." Pointing out the need for maintenance of peace, he commended to the people there the principles of *Panch Sheel.*

President Prasad's last trip in Indo-China was to Laos. Foreign diplomats, devout Buddhists and a large number of people greeted him at the Vientiane airport. In his reply to the welcome address of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, President of the Council of Laos, President Prasad conveyed to the people of Laos the goodwill of the people of India. Recalling the old cultural and spiritual relations between the two countries, he hoped that these would grow stronger in days to come.

At Laos, a youth rally was arranged for President

Prasad. To the young boys and girls assembled there, he spoke of the immense progress of modern science, which, if properly used, might produce much happiness on earth, and also advised them to understand and follow the ideals of brotherhood preached by Lord Buddha for creation of a better world. The *Basi* ceremony, which being the symbol of the highest regard paid to a guest, was celebrated in Vientiene in honour of President Prasad. The ceremony started with music and chanting of *mantras* in which some priests and the nobility participated. After this, some men and women proceeded on knees and tied a thread round the wrist of the guest. When this ceremony was over, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Laos observed about President Prasad : "Along with Gandhiji and Pandit Nehru, you have given a universal meaning to Satyagraha and in a world often prone to violence you have reminded people, disregarding the worst dangers, of the durable values of sweetness and tolerance." In reply to this President Prasad said that with the growth of contacts among nations, the cause of peace would be better served and said that he and others in India were trying their best to foster this for material progress and genuine happiness in human society.

At the invitation of the Government of Ceylon, President Prasad went there on a six-day visit. On his arrival at Colombo on June 16, 1959, he was received by the Governor-General and Prime Minister of Ceylon, some other dignitaries and a large number of people though it was raining heavily at that time. In a brief speech at the airport, President Prasad conveyed the good wishes and feelings of friendship of the people and Government of India to the people of Ceylon.

In his first public engagement in Ceylon, President Prasad visited the International Buddhist Centre in Colombo and unveiled there a replica of the statue of Buddha as was found at Sarnath and was presented by him there. He observed in his speech on this occasion that with all that had been achieved by men in the domain of science and technology, they needed a highly spiritual outlook which Buddhism alone could provide.

While laying the foundation of the building for the International Institute of the Ramakrishna Mission Centre in Colombo, he spoke in terms of deep reverence about the high ideals and selfless services of the Ramakrishna Mission and its influence throughout the world by virtue of its inherent excellence and the depth of conviction without any pomp or show.

A banquet was given in honour of President Prasad by the Governor-General of Ceylon and an address of welcome was presented to him by the Kandy Municipal Council. In the course of his address to the latter, he expressed his view that the nations of Asia and Africa, which had a new awakening, should adopt the principle of tolerance which Buddhism had proclaimed to the world and India had followed age after age so that the evils of militant nationalism might not overwhelm humanity. Referring to the mission of Prince Mahendra, son of Asoka, who had come to Ceylon in the past to propagate the faith of Buddhism from the same place to which he himself belonged, he observed : "I have come here to establish better relations between your country and mine. . . . . We shall ever be ready to do what is required for benefit and for good and let me hope you and your people will be equally generous and equally helpful not only in maintaining better relations but actually in setting examples for others to follow."

In his address at a joint reception accorded to President Prasad by the Indian Trade and Cultural Association, he advised the Indian community, "My request to you, or if you like, as President of the Republic of India, my order to you is to do your best for the country in which you live, not only for your own sake, your own benefit, but for the sake and benefit of the motherland also."

The last place to be visited by President Prasad in Ceylon was Jaffna, the Tamil-speaking northern part of Ceylon. Millions offered him a highly enthusiastic reception at the airport and on the 19-km. route leading to the city. Here he was presented a civic address in a silver casket by the Mayor. In his speech on this occasion, he said that the peoples of India and Jaffna had old linguistic and cultural links which were being strengthened during recent years. In his farewell broadcast, President Prasad observed : "Ceylon has an attraction for every visitor, but our very nearness and our many ancient ties and history have almost shaped us together and geography destined us to be the closest of friends. During this visit, I could see the confirmation, if it was necessary at all, of the friendship and of deep bonds that go back thousands of years into our storied past." The University of Ceylon conferred on President Prasad the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa,* on June 19, 1959.

Another goodwill mission of President Prasad was to the U.S.S.R. Growing Indo-Soviet contact has been a highly significant factor in the post-war period. Diplomatically, the two great countries have upheld the cause of peace. Culturally, there has been fruitful exchange of ideas and thoughts between the two, and elaborate arrangements have been made in the U.S.S.R. for the study of Indian subjects just as the Indians also have been anxious to study the recent achievements of Russia in different branches of knowledge.

During his visit to the U.S.S.R. from June 20 to July 5, 1960 President Prasad saw historical sites, art galleries, cultural institutions and centres of modern industrial and agricultural development. On his arrival at Moscow, he was given an enthusiastic reception and in his welcome speech the Soviet President, Leonid Brezhnev, expressed warm appreciation of India's ancient culture and modern struggle for freedom. Offering thanks for this welcome, President Prasad remarked: "I have looked forward to visiting your country which, geographically speaking, is almost a neighbour of India. I am very happy that I have now been able to undertake this journey which, I am sure, will be a voyage of discovery for me personally. We have heard many things about the great and striking progress that your country has made and the gigantic task of rebuilding which was completed after the destruction and the suffering of World War II. We have heard about your remarkable scientific and technical achievements and of the pioneering work done by your scientists in the exploration of outer space and of the world that lie beyond."

Speaking at a State banquet at the Kremlin given by the Soviet President in honour of President Prasad on June, 21, the latter observed: "In this rapidly shrinking world in which every country has become the neighbour of every other country, the close understanding between the leaders of your country and of mine is of much significance for, though the nature of your struggle and ours has been different, there are many ideals which we share in common.

"Like you we are striving for the good of the common man in our country, who for centuries had been denied economic opportunities, for giving him a reasonable standard of living. Like you a few decades earlier, we are now embarked on a gigantic industrialisation of our country—along with improvements in our age-long agricultural methods which will not only change the face of India, but bring to our 400 million people opportunities for a new life which did not exist till now.

"In this we have received the generous help of your Government as of many other friendly Governments.

"The modern steel plant at Bhilai, standing in the midst of a countryside which had not changed for centuries, the vast agricultural farm at Suratgarh, the huge machine-building plants which will shortly go up at Ranchi, the many oil wells which are sprouting on the western shores of India—these are a few of the projects in which we have had your ready assistance."

In conclusion, President Prasad said : "In the endeavour for disarmament and world peace which your country is making, you have our best wishes. Addressing our Parliament a few months ago in New Delhi, your Prime Minister said that 'like Prometheus Unbound, the peoples of Asia and Africa are straightening their mightly shoulders and starting to build a new life for themselves.'

"The one pre-condition for the success of these mighty efforts, which are now convulsing a significant part of the world, is the continuance of peace and tranquillity in the world. This is the task in which all of us must co-operate, because the price of failure would be disastrous."

President Rajendra Prasad was the guest of honour at a luncheon held in Moscow on June 22, 1960, by the Ambassadors of the Bandung countries. Among those present at this function were : Brezhnev, President of the U.S.S.R., N. V. Tsitsin, President, Soviet-Indian Cultural Relations Society, I. A. Benedictove, Soviet Ambassador to India, and the diplomatic representatives of Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, the People's Republic of China, Ceylon, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Japan, the Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, Thailand, and Turkey. In his speech on this occasion, President Prasad made the following observations : "I appreciate the honour which the representatives of the Bandung countries have done me by inviting me to be their guest this evening. In a sense, Bandung represents the end of one epoch in the history of Asia and Africa and the beginning of another. Much has happened in these two huge continents since then. Some of these developments might not be to the liking of all of us, but there can be no gainsaying the fact that the march to complete liberation of Asia and Africa from colonial rule continues unimpeded. If another similar conference were to be called today, at least 39 countries would join the conference and not 29 as in April 1955. The destinies of most people in Asia and Africa were controlled for centuries not by the people themselves but by the alien rulers. Bandung gave notice to the world that Asia and Africa were determined to decide and pursue their own independent policies and not bow to decisions taken for them by others. In that sense, the Bandung conference was an important landmark on the road to the complete liberation of Asia and Africa.

"Let us hope that the friendship and goodwill generated at Bandung will grow stronger and stronger, that in our day-to-day working and actual dealings with one another and with other nations, particularly with Bandung countries, all of us shall act in a manner calculated to foster and strengthen that spirit."

President Prasad was entertained at a reception given in his honour by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet in Moscow on June 30, 1960. Replying to the reception, he observed : "I have been for ten days in the Soviet Union and tomorrow I am leaving Moscow on my way back home. I am particularly happy that I shall have the opportunity of visiting two Asian members of the Soviet Union before I finally leave Soviet territory.

"These have been ten memorable days and they have left an indelible impression on me. From the time I set foot on Soviet soil I have been overwhelmed by the friendship and hospitality of the Soviet people and their Government. The cheering and enthusiasm of the people, young and old, men and women, wherever I have been during the last ten days, have reminded me of enthusiastic crowds in my country. I have been overwhelmed by this mass demonstration of friendship and cannot adequately express my thanks to the Soviet people. Your Excellencies, I came as a stranger to your country but you and your people have welcomed me as a dear friend and as I am about to leave, I feel sad. For, parting with a friend is always sad. I have said that the impressions on me during the last ten days have been overwhelming. I have visited old cathedrals, museums and art galleries. I have also seen a collective farm and your agricultural and industrial exhibitions in Moscow and the tremendous progress which you have made in every field. That you have been able to achieve so much and within such a short time has a lesson for all of us in underdeveloped countries. Your collective farms and your huge industrial projects represent one aspect of Soviet progress in recent years; the loving care with which you are protecting your past heritages—in your libraries, museums, art galleries and other cultural centres—is an eloquent expression of your pride in the past history of your country. As I said in Leningrad, Soviet life and culture to-day represent a happy blending of the past and the present, of art and science.

"Your Excellencies, Chairman and Members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, your country and mine have come very close to each other in recent years. Many of our Ministers and leaders in other walks of life have been to the Soviet Union. Our young men are receiving their training in your factories. Even to-day we have in Moscow a senior member of our Government, Morarji Desai. A few days ago our Minister of Oil and Mines was here discussing future development plans with the members of your Government. We have received very substantial assistance from the Soviet Government during the past five years. This has enabled us to plan and carry out a number of industrial and agricultural projects. I have read with much interest the details of your Seven-Year Plan. Compared with you we are still at early stages of the economic development of our country. We know that we have to rely on our own efforts for the progress of our country but I am happy to say that we have received very substantial assistance from a number of friendly countries in the execution of our first and second five-year plans. May I say that we are most grateful to the Soviet Government for the generous and unconditional assistance which you have given us.

"Bhilai stands as a monument of Indo-Soviet friendship and understanding but there are other projects in India also which have been made possible by Soviet assistance. I may be allowed to hope that such practical demonstration of Indo-Soviet friendship will continue in the years to come. Two days ago, I had the pleasure of planting a friendship tree in the public park at Sochi. I then expressed the hope that the friendship between the Soviet Union and India would last for years. I wish to repeat this expression of hope this evening.

"Your Excellencies, I have been for a very short period in this country and would not ordinarily lend myself to any general statement. I cannot, however, let this occasion pass without referring to one thing which has powerfully impressed me during the last ten days. I have watched crowds of working people enjoying their holiday at Sochi; I have seen thousands of young men and women participating in a festival in Kiev. I feel convinced that the Soviet people under the wise leadership of His Excellency. Mr. Khrushchev, want nothing more than to live at peace and enjoy the fruits which economic and material progress has brought them. Mr. Khrushchev is a firm believer in the policy of co-existence; so are we in India. He does not believe that war is inevitable; so do we not. This sharing of common ideals provides a bond between our two countries which, I am sure, will increase in the years to come. When, threfore, I heard large crowds at all the places I have visited saying, *Hindi Russi Bhai Bhai,* I reciprocated their feelings whole-heartedly. May I say again *Russi Hindi Bhai Bhai?"*

President Prasad also visited the Moscow University, where he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate.

In a reception arranged for President Prasad under the auspices of the Soviet Indian Friendship Society in the Kremlin Palace in Moscow on June 30, 1960, he said : "I am very grateful to the citizens of Moscow, to the workers as well as to the intelligentsia for having organised this meeting on the occasion of my visit to the Soviet Union. This striking manifestation of friendship towards my country and my people has touched me deeply. I shall not fail to convey your affectionate sentiments to my people when I return to India next week.

"This meeting forms the climax of many demonstrations of friendship which I have witnessed wherever I went, from magnificent Leningrad in the north to sunny Sochi in the south. Wherever I went I found the people happy, hard-working, devoted to peace, inquisitive about India and enthusiastic about Indo-Soviet friendship."

President Prasad saw Lenin's tomb and his study in the Kremlin. In the visitor's book kept there, he entered the following remark in Hindi : "I was lucky enough to see this widely known place and to learn everything relating to the great Lenin. I believe I am fortunate in this. I can imagine the inspiration every citizen gets on visiting this place. I was greatly impressed myself." President Prasad also visited Leningrad, Kiev and Sochi. At all places, he was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm, and he made significant statements about the influence of growing friendship among the nations to save the world from the harmful effects of any further cataclysm. The activities of the Institute of Oriental Studies at Leningrad and the valuable work done by the Soviet Indologists impressed him highly. The Director of this institute presented to him copies of a Russian translation of Kautilya's *Arthashastra* a Sanskrit-Russian dictionary and some volumes of classical Sanskrit works. The Moscow University conferred on President Prasad the honorary degree of Historical Sciences on June 27, 1960.

After completing this part of his tour, President Prasad returned to Moscow to meet the Soviet Prime Minister, Nikita Khrushchev, and some other Soviet leaders. In their meeting both President Prasad and Khrushchev had a frank talk about the mutual agreement on the Soviet disarmament proposals. Speaking at a reception, arranged by President Prasad in honour of the Soviet President and the Soviet Prime Minister, he observed : "The greatest need for all of us, irrespective of our social and political systems, is the proper planning and harnessing of the human and material resources under inspiring leadership. . . . I am now half-way on my voyage of discovery of the Soviet Union. What I have seen during the last few days has left a powerful impression on me. But what has touched me most is the warmth of friendship and welcome which the people and leaders of this great country have extended to me and other members of my party wherever we have been."

In the course of his return journey, President Prasad visited some important places like Stalinabad, Tashkent, Samarkand and Bokhara in the Central Asian Republics of Tajekistan and Uzbekistan. Besides being warmly welcomed at all these places, he attended a banquet given in his honour by the Chairman of the Presidium of the Uzbekistan Socialist Republic, Madame Yadgar Nasitutdinova. After a ceremonial send off at Tashkent, President Prasad returned to India. In his farewell speech, he expressed his good wihses to the people of the U.S.S.R. and wished them prosperity, happiness and peace. Assuring them that the people of India "will always be on the side of those who are working for peace", he observed : "We shall, therefore, support the efforts of your great leader, Mr. Khrushchev, in reducing tensions and promoting peace."

Referring to the President's goodwill mission to Russia, *The Hindu* of Madras wrote on July 11, 1960 : "The President's tour has no doubt done much to awaken new interest in Russia in our problems and the warm welcome he got everywhere shows that there is a fund of growing goodwill for India in the U.S.S.R., despite the differences in our political systems." President Prasad's biography with a portrait was published in the *New Times*, Moscow, in 1960, and his autobiography was published in Russian language from Moscow in 1961.

CHAPTER XVI

IDEALS AND PERSONALITY

ON the eve of his retirement, the citizens of Delhi presented an address to Dr. Prasad at a meeting held on May 10, 1962, on the Ramlila Grounds, Delhi. Overwhelmed by the love and affection shown to him by the citizens of Delhi on this occasion, he said in a highly graceful, elegant and appealing speech : "I bow my head in gratitude to you." He noted that with his retirement within a few days a chapter of his life was coming to a close. "From Rashtrapati Bhavan", he said, "I will now go back to my small Ashram in Patna. Some people say that it speaks of my humility and greatness. But I have no such claims to make. I have served the people in whatever capacity I have been called upon to serve from time to time. My entry into Sadaqat Ashram only means that from now onwards I will do my duty from new premises." Dr. Prasad stated that his health permitting, he would devote the rest of his life to the country's service. He mentioned how Mahatma Gandhi had taught the nation to be fearless and to attain objectives through non-violent means. This approach "represented the best in Indian traditions". "We shall advance", he observed, "materially but our roots must remain in our past."

After his retirement on May 12, Dr. Prasad went to stay from May 14 at the Sadaqat Ashram, his old hermitage where he had practised for several years his *yoga* of selfless love for the country. One day when I met him here he, in his insatiable thirst for knowledge, expressed his desire to get books for his study from the libraries at Patna.

In a message sent by him to the All-India Writers' Conference held at Allahabad for two days from January 31, 1963, he observed : "Had my health permitted me, I would have tried to participate in this Conference, assembled at Prayag. Still my best wishes and those of others who love their country are with you. Our country faces today the greatest peril after freedom. In a moment like this, the nation naturally looks up to you for light and guidance. I am confident that your deliberations will greatly fulfil this hope.

"The writer is not only a seer but also a creator. In spite of the ups and downs of history, the successful maintenance of the unbroken cultural unity of the country is largely due to the creative efforts of writers. To-day, this united voice of our culture is the basis of our nation-wide anger and indignation against Chinese aggression. This is the foundation of our national integrity whose roots cannot be shaken by any foreign invasion, howsoever huge it may be. To face the present challenge successfully, however, it is incumbent upon us to strengthen the cultural unity of the country along with political unity. This would not be possible without emotional integration. Poets and artists, writers and intellectuals have today also to lead the way as their predecessors did in the past. We have, however, to bear it in mind that the path for free development of our various languages, religion and philosophies should be kept open.

"We never want to wage war against any nation. Peaceful co-existence has not only been our ideal, it has been our practice, too. But the present aggression has been forced upon us by a treacherous neighbouring country in spite of the *Panch Sheel* agreeemnt it had signed with us.

"It is our sacred duty to resist unflinchingly this unprovoked, long-planned and wilful foreign attack on our motherland and such is our responsibility, too.

"Even today our goal is the re-establishment of peaceful co-existence and maintenance of world peace. But we must defend the sovereignty and freedom of our nation with all possible means.

"A flame burns in our hearts today to defend this freedom of our nation. It is our duty to keep it alive. It is in this direction that the country eagerly awaits your fearless views."

On the occasion of the presentation ceremony of the Hindi version of the *Kamban Ramayana* a Tamil epic, at Sadaqat Ashram on February 24, 1963, Dr. Prasad said that the task of propagating Hindi in the South should be left to the people there. He observed that during his visit to Madras some years ago, he had come to know that the number of students who had passed the different Hindi examinations there was five times the number which had passed the Matriculation examination. Dr. Prasad asked the Hindi-speaking people to learn the languages of the South and suggested that translations of the classics in the South Indian languages should be priced low. He hoped that thus national integration would be achieved and a feeling of oneness between the north and the south would develop. He thanked Professor N. G. Rajagopalan, the translator of the classic, and the Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Bihar, for bringing it out.

At 10.10 P.M. on February 28, 1963, Dr. Prasad breathed his last with the words "Ram, Ram" on his lips. He was 79. The Convocation Address, which he was to have delivered at Patna University that day, was read out by L. N. Sudhanshu, Speaker of the Bihar Legislative Assembly.

With his genuine love for knowledge and intimate association with many educational institutions throughout his life, Rajendra Prasad always took, as he himself said, "a keen interest in education"[1]. Even before he rose to prominence in public life, he had significantly observed in his Presidential Address at the Eighth session of the Bihari Students' Conference held at Monghyr in 1913, that the "question of education is all-embracing". After quoting some figures to show how Bihar was then backward in education, he pleaded that "our ideal, then, for the present at any rate, ought to be to extend the surface of education even though we cannot raise its height, to bring light to the door of the rich and the poor alike. . . ." and he urged the Committee formed for the establishment of a university at Patna "to so frame their scheme as to enable the humblest amongst us to take advantage of the University which it has pleased the Government to give us."

Dr. Prasad's conviction was that the objectives of education were three, two of which "relate more or less to the life of the individual as such, while the third is concerned with his collective life"[2]. Its first objective was "to enhance the power and capacity of reason of the individual given to him by God". The second objective was "so to train the senses of every individual human being as will enable him to employ them for fulfilling successfully all his physical and other needs". The third purpose of education was that "it should evoke in the individual the qualities necessary to enable him to live and work with his fellow-beings" He emphasised that education should aim at the development of the complete personality of an individual, as there were serious risks in what he termed "a split personality",

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1. *Convocation Address at the Kanya Mahavidyalaya*, Jullundur, September 29, 1952
2. *Patna University Convocation Address*, March 11, 1953

particularly in a country having several historical traditions, cultures and social systems.

The system of education which developed under British rule had, as he held rightly, some serious defects. Though it helped the intellectual growth of some of our countrymen, it widened the gulf between the intelligentsia and the common people, the city and the village and between modern men and our old healthy traditions. He pleaded a revolutionary change in the character of the Indian universities if they were to exist for the Indian people[3]. He also felt that in the system of education the nation inherited from British rule there was "little provision for character-building and moral training of students", and this has been responsible for some of our "moral shortcomings", though otherwise the country had produced some highly talented men.[4]

With a feeling that quantitative expansion of education and growth in the number of educational institutions had become matter for serious consideration, he strongly urged fundamental changes in the prevailing system of education, particularly because, as he said, "the outlook and mental make-up of students have not improved in the same proportion in which their numbers have increased"[5]. He pointed out that instead of a mere university degree, proper emphasis should be laid on "practice and practical experience"[6]. He emphasised once and again that "in the present system of education there is no place for character-building; nor is any importance attached to it. These days, on the other hand, we so often hear of students going on strike against teachers and also of teachers organising themselves into groups and their students dividing themselves into groups likewise...... If someone opposes them or criticises their activities, the students do not refrain from challenging him as well. If a stray student indulges in such a thing casually, it might be understandable. But when students of a school or college do such a thing in an organised manner, it becomes very distressing. As far as I can see, its basic reason is neglect of character-building and the lack of teachers' moral influence on students". He also regretted that the salutary influences of family and social life was "fading day by day"[7].

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[3] *Convocation Address at the Delhi University*, December 9, 1960

[4] *Speech in reply to the Address of Welcome by the Agra College and the Agra Students' Union*, January 29, 1951

[5] *Convocation Address at the Calcutta University*, December 26, 1952

[6] *Ibid*

Dr. Prasad held that among other reforms in university education, there should be a change in the medium of instruction, that is, it should be imparted through "the language of the people". Like Mahatma Gandhi, he had an honest conviction that for free India there should be one common Indian language for the whole country in place of a foreign language like English. As regards English language, he said: "We can neither boycott it nor ignore it. On the other hand, we must continue to cultivate it so that we remain in touch with modern trends and thoughts and are able to take part in international affairs and other international activities to our advantage."[8] He was in favour of encouraging our students to learn three languages—one regional language, Hindi and English—without much strain on them.

Pointing out that human relationships in our educational institutions had become formal and mechanical, and that

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7. *Ibid*

8. *Convocation Address at the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha, Madras,* August 18, 1956

students' indiscipline was very much due to the absence of a close and intimate relationship between the teacher and the taught, he observed : "I have a feeling that much of what you hear about indiscipline among students is but a natural consequence of the present state of things. Discipline, after all, is not always enforced but has to grow from within and for that purpose it requires the existence of certain natural conditions. These conditions are wanting and we cannot expect any better results."[9] He was opposed to uncontrolled cinema-mongering by the students in public cinema houses in the cities "where stories of crime, passion and gangsterism, lacking any moral purpose, are screened."[10] Cinema as a recreation, he advised, could be arranged in educational institutions by careful selection of films which did not produce bad effects on the minds of students.

Dr. Prasad attached great importance to the establishment of new type of university called "Rural University". The idea of starting such institutions had originated with Mahatma Gandhi many years ago and it was recommended by the Radhakrishnan Commission.

Dr. Prasad believed that our system of education would be truly useful if it was "integrated with the whole life of the Indian people instead of being merely related to the administrative system" as it had been so far. This required, according to him, the teaching of such subjects, including agriculture, in the universities as would promote the economic development of the country and a proper adjustment of the syllabi of our universities with its economic life. He further advocated the maintenance of statistics in our educational institutions in liaison with the organisations of public service, industries and agriculture, to help the students in getting information about the number of educated persons employed in a particular economic sphere so that they might select their subject of study profitably.

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[9] *Inaugural speech at the Silver Jubilee Session of the Inter-University Board at Banaras*, February 28, 1950.

[10] *Convocation Address at the Gurukul Kangri University* March 5, 1950

The Convocation Address, which Dr. Prasad was to deliver at the Patna University on February 28, 1963, was his last testament to the nation containing valuable advice for the teachers, the students and society in general. In the plan of educational reform, he pleaded for the full development of the student as a man. The two other vital points mentioned by him were the growth of close and personal contact between teachers and students and the role of the teacher as a "man with capacity to communicate something good". He exhorted the youths to face the battle of life with courage, dignity, efficiency and honesty.

Dr. Prasad had a strong conviction about the utility of what came to be known as Basic Education or *Nai Talim*, which had been introduced under the inspiration and advice of Mahatma Gandhi and in consultation with some educational experts after a conference convened at Wardha by Mahatma Gandhi. He thought that this scheme of education would give a practical character to our education instead of its being mere bookish or theoretical. "Education to-day", he once deplored, "is getting more and more divorced from actual life and its requirements. This, in turn, is responsible for the ever-increasing unemployment among the educated classes". The Radhakrishnan Commission advocated expansion of this scheme. In his speech at the foundation-stone laying ceremoney of the Gandhi Vidya Mandir, Sardarsahar (Rajasthan) on August 28, 1955, Dr. Prasad observed that Mahatma Gandhi made the village the most important centre of his activity...... It was his conviction that no public movement or reform of any kind could succeed in India unless the cooperation of the rural population was enlisted. It was as a result of this conviction that the basic system of education took its birth in Wardha. He added that the system was entirely in consonance with the requirements and the way of living of rural India.

With rational views about education of girls, Dr. Prasad held that "one of our greatest needs is the spread of education among our women". Fully conscious of the important role the women had to play in our national progress and social uplift, he attached great importance to freedom and education of women. "Women should", he affirmed, "assume their role as the ministers of the mind and the spirit of men."[12] Recalling the ancient traditions and high deals of cultured womanhood in our country in the past, he advocated a system of education for women, characterised by a careful blending of our old lofty ideals and conception about duties of women with the really progressive ideas of today for a healthy national reconstruction in all respects.

Initiated into historical studies during his student days under some distinguished professors, Dr. Prasad had always "a genuine interest in history", particularly history of India, which, as he said, "with all the ups and downs it has seen during the past centuries can furnish material for constructing what may be called a philosophy of history." During his tours in and outside India, he invariably visited places of historical interest and importance. In his speech as Chairman of the Reception Committee at the Ramgarh Session of the Indian National Congress (1940), he, after describing Bihar's unique historical importance since the days of remote antiquity and her ancient glories, observed that we can sometimes draw lessons from the past and get an inspiration from it. In his inaugural address at the Nagpur Session of the Indian History Congress, held on December 27, 1950, he very rightly pointed out that "India needs a true and exhaustive history of its distant and glorious past, no less than of its unique and unprecedented struggle which has succeeded in placing it once again on the map of the world". Referring to the varied and abundant historical materials available for the reconstruction of our history, he expressed the view, advocated by all historians today, that the history to be written "should be not only a connected and correct account of events as they have happened, of the wars, and conquests of kings and emperors, their heroic deeds and miserable misrule and the political upheavals; but also of how our life has been lived and shaped, how great religious, cultural and literary movements have arisen and influenced hundreds of millions of people and how art and science, industry and commerce have developed and fructified". He put forth a strong plea for the writing of a correct and comprehensive history of our national movement in its different phases. He very rightly believed that for a proper understanding of our national consciousness, a clear picture of our past is absolutely necessary. For drawing such a picture, he suggested collection of historical data, both in India and abroad, "with a single-minded purpose". While laying the foundation stone of the *Vikram Kirti Mandir* at Ujjain on May, 8, 1951, he pointed out that as Ujjain was an important centre of trade with the Middle East, so the old literatures of the Middle Eastern countries might contain references to Ujjain and its rulers. He suggested that "the world, instead of the nation", should be "the framework of historical writings", and that in "all historical writings the main emphasis should shift to the human spirit and the character of the region and the group concerned should be given only secondary importance". This is in line with the view of Rabindranath, who remarked in his book on nationalism, written in the days of World War I, that "there is but one history, that is, history of man. All other histories are but chapters to it". While laying the foundaton stone of the International Academy of Indian Culture on November 30, 1956, Dr. Prasad highly praised its programme for carrying on researches regarding the "exchange of thought and mutual give-and-take on the intellectual level" among the different countries in Asia from the past and pointed out its particular importance in our days when there has been a national upsurge in all of them.

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[12] *Address at the Mahila Vidyapith, Allahabad,* February 20, 1951

Dr. Prasad considered our past to be a grand source of inspiration for the present and the future and pleaded for a correct and critical study of it for our onward march on rational lines. Our heritage, full of moral and spiritual virtues, might help us greatly to meet the stupendous challenges of the modern world created by the technical achievements in science if we could effect a proper adjustment of the values of our past culture with the modern conditions.

While laying the foundation stone of the Nava Nalanda Mahavihara at Nalanda on November 26, 1952, and of the Prakrit Institute at Vaishali in North Bihar on April 23, 1956, he delivered highly instructive speeches about the importance of acquiring correct knowledge of the past of our country through original study of old literatures in Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit. He thus drew our attention to one great lesson from the history of our country : "Above all, they in India had to remember their past history. On many an occasion they had failed in their political sphere, not because their people, in groups, or as individuals, were lacking in any matter. They were brave, they were intellectually awake, they were otherwise quite fit. They were wanting in the spirit of cooperation, wanting in a spirit of working together for a common cause, and on many an occasion, they lost not because the country as a whole deserved to lose but because they were unable to put together all their efforts and energies".

Dr. Prasad encouraged historical investigations in various ways. It was under his inspiration that the Bharatiya Itihas Parishad was formed for the preparation of a correct history of our country in twenty volumes. Some eminent Indian historians like Dr. Jadunath Sarkar, Dr. R. C. Majumdar and Jaychandra Vidyalankar were associated with him. It was a matter of regret for him that the plan could not be implemented fully and he most gracefully and gladly agreed to its amalgamation with the plan of the Indian History Congress for a similar work of national importance.

With deep and extensive study of literature, history, law and other subjects, with profound knowledge of contemporary political, cultural and socio-economic matters, being intimately associated with most of these, and with noble idealism in himself, Dr. Rajendra Prasad was an author of several works of outstanding importance in the history of Indian nationalism. Even during his career as a college student in Calcutta, he contributed important articles to the *Dawn Magazine,* which provided a column for students. In the September 1905 issue of the *Dawn Magazine* appeared some questions relating to various social matters asked by Rajendra Prasad and Bhuvaneshwar Prasad Varma. In its issue of January 1906, Rajendra Prasad himself sent his replies to his questions. In the May, 1906 issue of the same came out an article by Rajendra Prasad, '*A Village in Bihar*'.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad's book, entitled *Satyagraha in Champaran,* in which he has given a detailed account of Mahatma Gandhi's successful crusade in Champaran on behalf of the peasants of the place against the tyranny of the European indigo-planters, was written in Hindi in 1919 and first published in 1922. An English version of it came out in March 1928. A revised English edition of it was published in 1949 by the Navajivan Press, Ahmedabad, and a revised Hindi edition has been published recently by the Bihar Rashtrabhasa Parishad.

Another book written by Dr. Prasad under the title *Mahatma Gandhi and Bihar : Some Reminiscences,* was published in December 1949. The first fifteen chapters of this book were written in 1931 and came out in *The Searchlight* of Patna as a series of articles. Subsequently the narrative was continued up to the time of Gandhiji's cruel murder on January 30, 1948. Dr. Rajendra Prasad writes in the preface to this work : "He (Mahatma Gandhi) transformed the Province by his short stay of a few months in 1917-18 and the occasional tours he undertook in later years....... We should feel satisfied that Bihar was privileged to earn his confidence. Let us strive to deserve it by fashioning the present and the future after the image of what he wanted Bharat to be." Dr. Prasad wrote in Hindi a valuable book entitled *Bapu Ke Kadamon Men,* which was published in 1950.

The first edition of Dr. Prasad's authoritative work on the Hindu-Muslim problem bearing the title of *India Divided* was published in January 1946. Its third revised edition, which came out in July 1947, was dedicated to the memory of Mazhar-ul-Haque, "a devout Muslim, a staunch nationalist and a passionate patriot". In this work he had collected plenty of information and material on the question of the partition of India which had assumed importance since the All-India Muslim League passed a resolution in favour of it at its Lahore session in March 1940. The book is written in six parts. "Part I deals with the theory of Hindus and Muslims being two nations. While showing that the theory is as unsupported by history and facts of everyday life, as by the opinion of distingushed and representative Mussalmans, it points out that even if it be assumed that the Mussalmans are a separate nation, the solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem in India should, on the basis of experience of other countries and on the strength of the latest and most authoritative writers of international repute on the subject, be sought in the formation of a multi-national State in which a powerful political union guarantees cultural autonomy to different national groups and not in the creation of national States which will not only leave the problem of national minorities unsolved but will also create more new problems relating to questions—financial, economic, industrial and political and defence and strategy—than it will solve".[13] Our leaders agreed to the partition of India under the pressure of circumstances. But later events have justified the observations of Dr. Prasad.

The most important book written by Dr. Prasad is his autobiography. The major portion of this book was written by him in prison between 1942 and 1945 and its narrative was brought down to the year 1946. It was originally written in Hindi and it had two editions in that language. Its English version was published in December 1957. This work presents a highly fascinating story of the career and achievements of one of the greatest personalities of modern India, who records here his varied experiences of life particularly in connection with our national movement. It is in a sense an authentic and valuable source book for the history of this movement.

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[13] *Preface to the First Edition*

In the year 1941, at the invitation of Maharajadhiraj Kameshwar Singh of Darbhanga, Dr. Prasad delivered two lectures in the Shri Mithilesh Mahesh Ramesh Lecture series in which he expressed his views about "the richness and glory of Sanskrit literature". These lectures were published in book-form under the title of *Sanskrit Ka Adhyayan*. Further, in his other speeches and Convocation Addresses he dealt with almost all matters concerning political life, national movement, education, literature, social reform and economic improvement of the people of our country. With mastery over details, he wrote with courage, faith and conviction. All his writings bear the stamp of originality and thoughtfulness and they contain words of inspiration for the readers.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad evinced great interest in Hindi language and literature and made valuable contributions for the development of Hindi as the National Language of India. Reference has already been made to his several works written in Hindi. Dr. Prasad was selected to be the President of the special session of the All-India Hindi Literary Conference at Cocanada in 1923, of the Bihar Hindi Sahitya Sammelan at Laheriasarai (Darbhanga) in 1925 and of the Akhil Bharatiya Hindi Sahitya Sammelan (All-India Hindi Literary Conference) held at Nagpur in 1935.

His *Atmakatha* (autobiography) won for him an award of Rs. 1,000 from the Bihar Rashtra Bhasa Parishad. This award he thankfully returned to the Parishad with the request that it might be utilised for helping indigent writers. This amount has now been converted, with an annual recurring grant of Rs. 8,000 by the State Government, into the Rajendra Nidhi for rendering necessary financial aid to the deserving authors.

Besides being a good writer in Hindi, Dr. Rajendra Prasad was closely associated with many poets and authors and special mention may be made of Pandeya Jagannath Prasad, M.A., B.L., Kavyatirtha, Darshankesari, an erudite scholar of Sanskrit and Hindi and a born litterateur, at whose sad demise he made touching observations at the Bihar Hindi Sahitya Sammelan held at Laheriasarai in 1925.

The Conference of 1925 was of special significance since the question of the controversy regarding Hindi and Urdu and Devanagri script and Persian script was one of the subjects discussed in it. In his Presidential Address, Dr. Rajendra Prasad expressed his regret at the growing feeling of distrust amongst those who held opposite views. He said : "Some Mussalman brethren of this Province have been of late developing ideas of doubt and mistrust regarding Hindi language, Hindi literature and the Devanagri script. When I hear that insinuations are made against Hindus and those fostering the cause of Hindi literature that they intend to abolish Islamic culture from this country and that the basis of Islamic culture is imbedded in Urdu literature and the Persian script, I feel not only astonished but greatly worried. As a Hindu I do know and can assert that all this is nothing but a figment of the mind—a hallucination . . . . .Although to-day the gap between Hindi and Urdu vocabulary has been widening, yet I am not prepared to accept that Urdu belongs to Islamic culture or is the property of the Mussalmans and the Hindus have nothing to do with it. Similarly, I am not ready to admit that Hindi is the property of the Hindus alone and the Mussalmans have no right over it. Both in Hindi and Urdu literatures there are instances to prove that though politicians may create differences as they like, yet those devoted to literature have never accepted the bondages of religion or community and, if we reasonably consider the matter, there can be no question of controversy between Hindi and Urdu."[14]

Another important point discussed at this Conference was the question of the medium of instruction. About it Dr. Rajendra Prasad said : ...."I believe that so long as our children are not educated through the medium of their own language they will neither be good or talented scholars nor shall they be able to assimilate knowledge and contribute to literature or bring about any improvement in the literary field. ... This is why the well-wishers of our country and sincere teachers have all along been pressing that in our elementary schools and institutions for higher education the medium of instruction should be the mother-tongue."[15]

Dr. Rajendra Prasad considered Hindi to be quite suitable for being the Indian national language, as it was "the most common and most widely understood" of all the Indian languages. So, the Constituent Assembly adopted Hindi as the State language for all-India purposes. As perhaps the switch-over from English to Hindi in matters of all-India importance was to be slow and gradual, the Constituent Assembly stipulated that within fifteen years of the promulgation of our Constitution, Hindi would replace English in the "agreed spheres". Dr. Prasad, however, did not like any attempt to impose Hindi on the people of any area and again and again assured the people of the South to this effect.

Dr. Prasad had a firm conviction about India's fundamental cultural unity notwithstanding the diversities in population, religion, language and physical features. "A careful examination reveals", he observed at the inaugural address of the All-India Cultural Conference at Delhi on March 15, 1951, "beneath all these diversities, a unity which threads all these diversities into one, in the same way in which a silk thread unites different kinds of beautiful gems into a single beautiful necklace of which not a single gem is separate or can be separated from the others; and each gem not only charms by its beauty, but adds to the beauty of the others. This is not a poetic fancy but a well-established truth." He urged the people to reinforce and vitalise this basic ethical consciousness of fundamental unity to make it applicable to the modern conditions of life.

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[14] *Bihar ki Sahityik Pragati*, published by Bihar Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, p. 185

[15] *Ibid*, p. 207

While proper rediscovery of our past was justly considered by. Dr. Prasad to be an important factor for our national regeneration, he duly recognised the value of scientific research and the application of their results for amelioration of the conditions of life of the masses. "Science", as he pointed out, "has succeeded in working wonders in many spheres of life", and he advised our people to improve their agriculture and industries by proper utilisation of the discoveries of science and to fight the scourge of diseases.

While inaugurating the 17th Annual Meeting of the Indian Academy of Sciences at New Delhi on December 27, 1951, he said : "To-day, no country can afford to lag behind in scientific study, if it desires to keep its head above water. It is not possible for us to keep out of the current set in motion by science and scientific work done in other countries, even if we wish to do so. We must, therefore, keep ourselves abreast of progress in the world at large. For that purpose, two aspects, which to a layman like me appear to be rather distinct from each other in their practical application, have to be kept in view. One is research of a theoretical or fundamental character, and the other is the application of the results of such fundamental research to the solution of the problems of everyday life and further the spread of practical scientific knowledge in our daily life in the field, factory, or home, by every man and woman—young or old, rich or poor."

Dr. Prasad, however, strongly advocated the revival of our old village industries and wide-spread use of the *Charkha* and Khadi as efficacious means for rehabilitating our village economy. Use of the *Charkha* and production of Khadi would, he rightly held, provide employment to our agriculturists during their leisure time thus helping them to augment their income. As in the past in our country women also in middle class homesteads could utilise a part of their spare time for spinning thread to produce Khadi, even of superior quality. Cottage industries had an important role to play in the economic set-up of the country today. He advised the Government Departments to propagate and arrange for the use of Khadi in the uniforms and clothes required by them. As a matter of fact, our old economy was characterised by a fair co-ordination between agriculture and rural industries and a revival of this would undoubtedly fullfil a great national need. He pleaded for Government subsidy to village industries, "when millions of people benefit from them and get employment because of them". "It is no argument", he added, "to suggest that it is useless to manufacture an article on a small scale when the same article can be manufactured and offered at a cheaper price by bigger industries. Our hesitation to offer certain article at a slightly higher price would virtually mean growing unemployment for millions and consequently forcing them to starve. We have, therefore, to choose between unemployment and starvation on the one hand and a slightly higher cost of certain manufactured articles on the other. No wise man, I am sure, would prefer large scale unemployment to paying a slightly higher cost."[16]

With a genuinely humanitarian outlook and an instinctive love for mankind in general, Dr. Prasad had a mission throughout his life to ameliorate the living conditions of the despised and the down-trodden through social service of the right-type without any glamour or spectacularism. He had due appreciation of the social services rendered voluntarily in our country in the nineteenth century and later on by various philanthropic socio-religious organisations like the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, the Servants of India Society and the Servants of People Society, which was founded at Lahore by Lala Lajpat Rai, and whose headquarters was shifted to Delhi, and the Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya at Thyagarayanagar (Madras) founded by Mahatma Gandhi himself. He expected much valuable work in this respect from the Central Social Welfare Board, which was established in 1953 under the chairmanship of Durgabai Deshmukh, and also from the State Social Welfare Boards.

Two most significant social changes in modern India are the uplift of the Harijans and the removal of untouchability. Recalling the noble traditions of our country for the service of humanity and inspired by the most liberal attitude of his great master in such social matters, Dr. Rajendra Prasad did much to facilitate these changes. While inaugurating the Mahatma Gandhi Community Centre at the Harijan Colony, New Delhi, on the April 5, 1954, he observed that "the Father of the Nation has lived here for many a week. This place has been sanctified

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Inaugural speech at a conference convened by the All-India Khadi and Village Industries Board, November 17. 1954 by his sermons, which, delivered after the prayer meetings held in this Colony before and after India's independence, still echo in our ears." Referring to the provisions in our Constitution regarding equal opportunities for all, he observed, "I have an unswerving faith that the silvery rays of the sun, which has arisen on the Indian horizon after centuries of slavery, will brighten up every nook and corner of this land and that every citizen, irrespective of any distinction of colour, caste or creed will feel the life-giving warmth of these rays."

Dr. Prasad was anxious for improvement in the social and economic conditions of the *Adivasis,* with whose problems in different parts of India he was familiar, particularly because of his close connection with the Bharatiya Adimjati Savak Sangh. It was certainly an uphill task but it was laid down in our Constitution and it was "very essential and urgent". He attached special sanctity to it as he felt that it involved "the clearing of centuries-old cobwebs and improving the lot of a long-suppressed section of the Indian population". He gave the following advice to the office-bearers and workers of the Adimjati Sevak Sangh : "They should go to the *Adivasis* in a spirit of modesty and equality. If, for any reason, these people get the impression that we are helping them out of pity or because we consider ourselves more advanced than they, you can be sure that your efforts will hardly bear fruit. It is after all a fact that it is not in the feeling of pity that the spirit of our action lies. If the *Adivasis* have remained backward for ages, it is none of their fault. Let us tell them that India is now a free country in which every citizen, including the *Adivasis,* has equal rights. This is possible only if we develop a sympathetic attitude towards them, an attitude which does not smack of superiority. We should also be sympathetic towards the customs and traditions of these people. Then alone will the prospect of economic and social improvement attract these people."

Dr. Prasad had genuine sympathies also with the tribal people. In his anxiety to meet them and to get first-hand knowledge about their condition, he visited their area in 1954. In his reply to the address of welcome presented to him at Tura (Garo Hills, Assam), he observed : "I am not one of those who look upon the tribal people as backward. I know you have your own customs, your own culture, your own way of life. We are anxious that you should progress and do so in your own special way." He was the first Head of the State to visit those parts and he assured the people there that their interest would be the interest of the country as a whole.

Dr. Prasad was one of the most prominent exponents of the Gandhian ideals of world peace and harmony. Like Mahatma Gandhi, one of the noblest prophets of modern humanity, he rightly recalled that India's eternal message of international concord and amity, preached and proclaimed age after age by her saints, seers, philosophers and religious reformers, had a great significance in the distracted world of today, which had not fully recovered from the ravages of the two global cataclysms, like World War I and World War II. In his speech at the UNESCO Seminar organised at New Delhi from January 5 to 17, 1959, Dr. Rajendra Prasad presented a comprehensive account of Gandhian philosophy and techniques in all respects, and pointed out that "Gandhiji had a picture of his own for society, because he felt that non-violence could not be established and violence could not be abjured unless the causes which led to violence, which make non-violence difficult of application, are removed. We know that all conflicts in this world arise because of conflicting desires of individuals, and those desires relate to something material, something external, desires to have something which the other man also wants, but that they cannot be made available to or shared by both." He emphasised the efficacy of the Gandhian method of true non-violence for eradication of tensions between nations and within nations.

The triumphs of science and growth of technological knowledge have placed at man's disposal plenty of opportunities for progress in different ways, but these have produced a situation, which, Dr. Prasad aptly observed, "may lead to the destruction of civilisation and annihilation of mankind if man was foolish and short-sighted enough to abuse and misuse the opportunities and advantages which science and technology had to offer. With this conviction, in his inaugural address at the Anti-Nuclear Arms Convention, organised by the Gandhi Peace Foundation at Rajghat, New Delhi, from June 16 to 18, 1962, he strongly pleaded for "the cessation of nuclear tests, banning of nuclear weapons and total disarmament," and for adjuring the use of force altogether. "To provide the antidote to the atom bomb requires," he added, "non-violence of the highest type," which Gandhiji demanded by a change in our outlook and way of life. Dr. Rajendra Prasad also said that India "should disarm unilaterally and help break the vicious circle of mutual fear and distrust which stood in the way of universal disarmament." Gandhiji conceived of a human society based on love and *Ahimsa* or non-violence. "It is a matter for regret and shame," said Dr. Prasad, "that with Gandhiji's passing away, we have been somewhat sliding down the scale. That is seen in all spheres of life."[17]

Eminent persons, in and outside India, paid high tributes to Dr. Rajendra Prasad for his manifold qualities of head and heart before and after he became President of India. For his whole-hearted and ungrudging service to Mahatma Gandhi during his Champaran Mission in 1917-18, the latter wrote : "Rajen Babu and Braj Kishore Babu were a matchless pair. Their devotion made it impossible for me to take a single step without their help."[18] Mahatma Gandhi considered the village of Zeradei as "a place of pilgrimage for us being the place where Rajendra Babu was born." The Editor of *The Searchlight,* a nationalist daily of Patna, wrote on April 11, 1931: "Babu Rajendra Prasad has not only the spiritual fervour but has got intellectual keenness of a very high order, and he is a man of action too like Sardar Patel. He was incessantly moving about, and perhaps no leader in his own Province worked as hard and moved so much during the last revolutionary upheaval as Babu Rajendra Prasad did in his own Province. He has, what Newman describes, the chief characteristic of a gentleman—the talent of not offending and perhaps that is the reason why no leader in his own Province enjoys in the same measure the popularity and respect among non-Congressmen or political opponents that Babu Rajendra Prasad enjoys in his own Province. He is an untiring worker...... For good or ill, he has merged himself in Gandhi. It is not merely hero-worship, it is devotion to an ideal."

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[17] *Speech on the occasion of the inauguration of Gandhi Kalai Munram* Rajapalaiyam, November 16, 1955

"A peasant in his garments but a prince among workers," thus Nariman described the frail figure of Rajendra Prasad when he stood up at Bombay as President of the forty-eighth session of the Indian National Congress in 1934. Referring to his address on this occasion the *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* of October 27, 1934, observed : "The most noticeable thing about the Presidential Address is that the speech is like the man. It is quite in keeping with his character. Simple, unassuming, immensely patriotic and extremely self-sacrificing, Rajendra Prasad of Bihar has been one of the most apt pupils of Mahatma Gandhi. His whole life has been dedicated to the cause of truth, non-violence and the service of the motherland. He is one of our few public leaders who has made silent and selfless work the mission of his life." Another Calcutta daily, *The Forward,* wrote on October 25, 1934: "But fortunately in Rajendra Prasad we have a leader who is well able to shoulder the heavy responsibility that has fallen on him by his transparent sincerity and integrity, and by his silent sacrifices, patient services and all-embracing sympathies, he has won universal respect and admiration in India."

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[18] *Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi,* p. 512

Referring to Rajendra Prasad in his article on the earthquake in Bihar, Jawaharlal Nehru said, "Truth looks at you through those eyes. There may be controversies about the nature and content of truth; there will be none about the utter frankness and truth that looks at one through the eyes of Rajendra Prasad." Again Nehru spoke about him at the Ramgarh session of the Congress in 1940. "We often commit mistakes. Our steps falter. Our tongues falter and slip. But here is a man who never makes a mistake, whose steps do not falter, whose tongue does not falter or slip, and who had no occasion to withdraw what he once said or was undone what he once did." While unveiling a portrait of Rajendra Prasad in the Kerala Assembly Chamber on April 27, 1958, Nehru remarked : "Rajen Babu not only occupies the highest office in our country but is something much more. Perhaps more than anyone else he embodies in his life the Indian national movement through which we have passed. The great national movement had many facets and it had with it many types of leaders. Dr. Rajendra Prasad represents the basic Indian values and tradition and, more especially, of rural India, though he is not an ordinary peasant. He is highly intellectual, a great educationist and an able lawyer."

On the occasion of Rajendra Prasad's birthday, Sri Prakasa (the then Governor of Maharashtra) said in December 1955 : "To-day, I express the earnest hope that he might be spared to us for many many years to come so that he might keep us, by precept and by example, on the strict path of righteousness, for to my mind, he is truly the embodiment of the spirit of Gandhiji. To-day, I also recall his many virtues of simplicity of personal life; of nobility of nature; of helpfulness to all; of sympathy with and understanding of persons in every grade of life; of devotion to the Master; of fulfilling in his own person the many things he undertook to do in times and circumstances that were very different from what they are at present. To-day I would also like my countrymen not only to be satisfied by felicitations and good wishes but also to try to live in their own lives as he has lived his. . . ."

Sri Prakasa added : "Shri Rajendra Prasadji is very keen on the fulfilment of the vows that he had taken in the past in very different circumstances, regardless of the difficulties that his present sphere of activity may entail in this regard. Few of us are so scrupulous and meticulous in this matter. We take vows because peculiar circumstances lead us to take them; but there is always the implied reservation in our minds that they are only meant to be fulfilled if and only so far as circumstances continue as they were at the time and if they permit fulfilment of these. Not so he. Guests at Rashtrapati Bhavan can still see through the windows overlooking the gardens the Rashtrapati himself sitting quietly, unconcernedly in some quiet corner plying his *Charkha* because thirty five years or so ago, he had said that he would ply it every day. The same applies in the matter of the use of Khadi which so many of us are now discarding because Swaraj having been wōn, we feel that the purpose of Khadi has been fulfilled."

Referring to the year 1918 when many were coming under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, M. R. Jayakar, one of the prominent liberal leaders of our country, said : "Patna yielded an esteemed disciple, Rajendra Prasad, a lovable character, highly respected in circles, official and non-official, known for great integrity, purity of life and intense modesty, in every way a fitting torch-bearer of the new dispensation."[19]

Referring to the three great Congress leaders, Vallabhbhai Patel, Abul Kalam Azad, and Rajendra Prasad, John Gunther wrote in 1959 : "If Patel is the ruthless first of the Congress triumvirate, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad a part of the brain and spiritual enlightenment, then Babu Rajendra Prasad is the heart. This man has great personal quality..... He is one of Gandhiji's warmest friends, and next to him is probably the most beloved man in India; he is mild and engaging in manners, and without an enemy."[20]

Chester Bowles, United States Ambassador in India, wrote about President Prasad : "Rajendra Prasad is a simple-living follower of Gandhi, who spent many years in British jails fighting non-violently for Indian freedom. He wore a white *dhoti* made of hand-spun yarn. He has a walrus-like moustache, and his magnificent face always seems to be holding back a smile at the strange twist of history which took him from the British Viceroy's jail into the Viceroy's own palace with the Viceroy's own bodyguard. He is such a warm and unostentatious person that the great long walls and chambers must have seemed oppressive and unnatural."[21]

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[19] M. R. Jayakar, *The Story of My Life, Vol. I*, p. 372

[20] John Gunther, *Inside Asia*, pp. 480-81

Comparing Rajaji and Rajendra Prasad, Michael Breacher wrote[22] : "By contrast Prasad is a kindly, gentle-looking man. He is sturdy and tall, heavy, slow-moving with a muddy complexion and an impressive bushy moustache. Simple in dress and manners, never without his Gandhi cap, he looks very much like the father-figure he is to many Indians today. An orthodox Hindu and a devout believer in pure non-violence, Prasad was among all Gandhi's political disciples, the most spiritually akin to the Mahatma. . . . . Prasad has been loyal to his mentor throughout his public life."[22] Louis Fischer described him as "a gentle, modest, compliant, retiring, well-intentioned. high-minded person more inclined to serve than to lead."[23]

Dr. Rajendra Prasad's personality presented a brilliant combination of the various sterling qualities of an ideal man. A scholar of the highest calibre, a fearless patriot and national leader being always in the vanguard of the country's battle for freedom, a man of spotless character whom power and position could not lead astray from the path of righteousness and whose modesty under all conditions was unique, a true representative of Indian culture with deep admiration for its noble traits, and an unfailing friend of the poor and the down-trodden, he has left a legacy of inspiration for unnumbered generations. Wordsworth wrote of Milton :

> *"Milton ! thou shouldst be living at this hour*
> *England hath need of thee . . . . ."*

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[21] Chester Bowles, *Ambassador's Report* (*Comet Books*), 1954, p. 25

[22] Michael Brecher,' *Nehru, A Political Biography* (1959), p. 86

[23] Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1950), p. 488

So to-day, when we are confronted with numerous perplexing problems in the political and social spheres, we feel like saying:

> *"Rajendra, thou shouldst be living at this time,*
> *India hath need of thee."*

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